BIBLICAL AND LITURGICAL SYMBOLS WITHIN THE PSEUDO-DIONYSIAN SYNTHESIS

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Biblical and Liturgical Symbols Within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis

The writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (ca. 500 AD) are here presented as a coherent synthesis. Their material unity results from the author's pervasive concern for the symbols of the liturgy (*The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*) and especially of the Bible, whether its names for God (*The Divine Names*) or its descriptions of the angels (*The Celestial Hierarchy*). As outlined in *The Mystical Theology*, their formal unity is provided by the Neoplatonic construct of a downward "procession," associated with affirmations, and an upward "return," associated with negations. Christian symbolism, whether ritual acts or scriptural language in general, is a divine self-revelation which proceeds "down" into the human categories of thought and sense perception. This procession provides the means for a return which lifts the faithful "up" first to the higher conceptual realm, through the negation and interpretation of all perceptible symbols, and then to the very Godhead, through the negation and abandonment of all interpretations, all language, and even all thought.

This argument can help specify the relationship of Pseudo-Dionysius to his patristic and Neoplatonic predecessors even though no new attempt at an historical identification is here attempted. Some new avenues of inquiry are also suggested regarding the widely different uses made of the Dionysian writings in the western Middle Ages.

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Dedicated
to the memory of three grandparents,
to my grandmother Anna Rorem,
and especially to my parents,
Gladys and Joseph Rorem,
for all they have given me.

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Preface

It is a pleasure to acknowledge publicly my three principal debts in writing the doctoral dissertation which has now, at length, become a book. I owe its foundations, first of all, to Dr. Oliver K. Olson, now of Marquette University and the Herzog-August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, who patiently introduced me to the challenge of liturgical theology as a scholarly discipline, the importance of Neoplatonism for the history of Christian thought, the writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, and the satisfying exhaustion of ongoing research.

Second, the research process was greatly aided by grants from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst and the Fulbright Commission for a year of work in Germany and Italy, respectively. While many scholars in those two countries and elsewhere gave generously of their time and counsel, particularly gracious were the three editors of the critical text of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus now nearing completion in Göttingen: A. M. Ritter, Gunther Heil, and Beata Suchla. Through their helpfulness, I was able to consult much of the forthcoming edition and obtain an advance copy of the exhaustive index.

Third, for the structure of what follows, I am indebted most of all to my Doktorvater, Professor Karlfried Froehlich of Princeton Theological Seminary. His careful reading and penetrating analysis of preliminary drafts helped pull together one argument from a multitude of observations. For that assistance and for his ongoing guidance and encouragement, I am deeply grateful.

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Finally, I thank the parishioners of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Edison, New Jersey, whose generosity and support enable me to "publish and parish," and my wife, Kate Skrebutenas, the Reference Librarian at

Princeton Theological Seminary's Speer Library, for her sharp eye, keen ear, and above all, her good heart.

May this monograph be at least a distant reflection of such clear guiding lights. Yet its dimmer qualities, whether of substance or of style, mirror only my own lack of insight.

Paul Rorem
Edison, New Jersey, USA
Lent 1984

Abbreviations

CH	Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*
dM	Iamblichus, *de Mysteriis*
DN	Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*
DW	Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen Werke*
EH	Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*
Ep	Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistles*
MT	Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*
NT	Bible, New Testament
OT	Bible, Old Testament
PG	Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*
PL	Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*
SC	Sources Chrétiennes

The system for citing the Dionysius corpus is explained on p. 5 note 7.

Part One
Foundations

1

Introduction

Students of medieval thought should be forgiven for assuming that the Pseudo-Dionysian writings were some massive encyclopedia supplying the Middle Ages with authoritative views on everything from angelology and aesthetics to metaphysics and mysticism. The Areopagite, after all, is credited with the definitive late medieval arrangement of the celestial beings in three triads: seraphim, cherubim, and thrones; powers, lordships, and authorities; principalities, archangels, and angels. Art historians have long noted his wide influence on medieval aesthetics, specifically on the emergence of Gothic architecture under Abbot Suger of St. Denys. John the Scot (Eriugena) and Thomas Aquinas wrote commentaries on Dionysian treatises and each organized his own most important work according to a metaphysical framework found in this same Dennis. Finally, it is common knowledge that certain medieval mystics invoked the authority of the same author's minute tract, *The Mystical Theology*.

Those who know the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus only by its well deserved reputation for this broad and deep influence may need to have two illusions dispelled. First, the corpus is not large at all, but actually very brief, about the size of Gregory of Nyssa's *Commentary on The Song of Songs*: approximately one hundred and seventy-five columns of text. More importantly it is not a potpourri of unrelated essays on these various topics, but a single framework of terse thought which embraces them all, and more. Medieval readers of the corpus often ripped their favorite material from the original garment and then so isolated the resulting patches that their intended relationships to each other and to the whole were obscured. A single, comprehensive viewpoint on the *corpus areopagiticum* would not only stimulate existing Dionysian scholarship, but would also permit medievalists to re-evaluate the use of the Areopagite in their various authors.

Yet all Pseudo-Dionysian questions are complex, and even tentative answers are elusive. The works long attributed to this Dionysius of Mars' Hill, St. Paul's Athenian convert, still guard their secrets well. That there was a Dionysius the Areopagite in earliest Christian tradition is clear from the biblical Acts of the Apostles, chapter seventeen. From there on, the clarity fades. Even the first generation to "discover " his supposed writings, around 530 AD, found them puzzling. The initial sceptics, such as the Chalcedonian Hypatius of Ephesus,[1] were quickly forgotten. Despite the philological and theological misgivings of certain Humanists and Reformers, Christian writers of all times and places honored this mysterious corpus as apostolic and therefore highly authoritative for almost fourteen hundred years. Only at the beginning of the current century did the question of authorship find firmer ground as scholarly opinion accepted the independent conclusions of H. Koch and J. Stiglmayr that the language of this author belongs to the same time and school as the fifth-century Neoplatonism of Proclus.[2] Both scholars went on to contribute to many areas of research on Pseudo-Dionysius, as the unknown author has been called ever since.[3] This new perspective posed a double question for most of the subsequent research: who, then, was the author and what was the relative dependence of his thought upon Neoplatonic and Christian predecessors? Sixty years of efforts to identify the author and the pedigree of his ideas did not yield a consensus. In the resulting stalemate, the "dionysian fever" of the 1950s[4] virtually disappeared by the subsequent decade.[5]

[1] *Innocenti Maronitae ad Thomam presbyterum epistula de collatione cum Severianis*, ed. E. Schwartz, in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 4.2.173. See also P. Sherwood, "Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac Versions of the pseudo-Denis," *Sacris Erudiri* 4 (1952): 182.

[2] Hugo Koch, "Der pseudo-epigraphische Character der dionysischen Schriften," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 77 (1895): 353-421. Josef Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogen. Dionysius Areopagiten in der Lehre vom Übel," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253-273.

[3] Particularly important is Koch's *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neoplatonismus und Mysterienwesen* (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim, 1900). This work will be cited as *Pseudo-Dionysius*.

[4] The best overview of the literature up until 1960 is provided by Jean-Michel Hornus in two bibliographical articles: "Les recherches récentes sur le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 35 (1955): 404-448, and "Les recherches dionysiennes de 1955 à 1960," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 41 (1961): 22-81. In this second article Hornus notes, "la 'fièvre dionysienne', loin de se calmer, paraît au contraire s'étendre toujours davantage" (p. 22). For the largest bibliography on Pseudo-Dionysian studies, see Placid Spearritt, *A Philosophical Enquiry into Dionysian Mysticism* (Bösingen: Rotex-Druckdienst, 1975).

[5] The authorship question is now nearly dormant and can be surveyed in Ronald F.

A new approach has become necessary, as suggested by Bernhard Brons:

> Thus attempts at identification and a clear establishment of the relationships to the church fathers and contemporary philosophy are promising of success only if beforehand a clear picture is gained in detail of what Dionysius actually wants to say.[6]

But Brons himself overlooked the formal starting point of what Dionysius wanted to say. The corpus has a unity of subject matter which he and almost all modern interpreters neglect. Whatever his hidden agenda, this author wished to present his treatises as expositions of the scriptures and of the liturgy. Of his three large works, two treat the biblical names for God and the biblical depictions of the angels (*The Divine Names* and *The Celestial Hierarchy*), and the third interprets the rituals of the church (*The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*).[7] In both realms, Dionysius seeks and interprets the sacred symbols. Yet this announced concern for biblical and liturgical symbolism has been treated as a formality, as a superficial or even

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Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 31-35. To be cited as *Hierarchy*.

[6] "Identifizierungsversuche und reine Feststellung von Beziehungen zu Kirchenvätern und zeitgenössischer Philosophie sind nur dann erfolgversprechend, wenn zuvor in Kleinarbeit ein klares Bild von dem gewonnen ist, was Dionys eigentlich sagen will." Bernard Brons, *Gott und die Seienden. Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von neuplatonischer Metaphysik und christlichen Tradition bei Dionysius Areopagita* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), p. 27. Brons posed his own questions of Christian orthodoxy to the Dionysian concepts of the Trinity, creation, and the incarnation. The Areopagite fails this examination and is likened to a sincere Sisyphus failing to balance Christian tradition on Neoplatonic foundations (p. 327). To be cited as *Gott und die Seienden*.

[7] The other treatises of the corpus are *The Mystical Theology* and the (ten) *Epistles*. Citations will be made from the Migne text (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, 3 [1857]), including its system of column numbers and division letters. To specify a citation further, the line number within the entire column (not within an individual, alphabetical subdivision) will also be given according to the system already used in the Sources Chrétiennes edition of *La Hiérarchie Céleste* (SC 58, text by G. Heil [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1958]). This system is also planned for the forthcoming critical edition of the entire corpus (Die Patristische Kommission der Westdeutschen Akademieen der Wissenschaften, Göttingen), edited by A. Ritter, G. Heil, and B. Suchla. For example, documentation regarding the biblical subject matter of *The Divine Names* and *The Celestial Hierarchy* is found in DN 1 588C 31-34 and CH 1 121A 6-11 (as discussed more fully in chapter two, below).

The best published translation of the whole corpus is by Maurice de Gandillac, *Œuvres complètes du Pseudo-Denys L'Aréopagite* (Paris: Aubier Éditions, 1943). To be cited as *Œuvres complètes*. A new German translation is in preparation by the Göttingen editors. An English translation and notes by Colm Luibheid and myself is forthcoming in The Classics of Western Spirituality series (Paulist Press). The current study usually follows that translation, with permission.

misleading format unworthy of serious discussion. Quite the opposite assumption underlies the current study: the presentation of these treatises as expositions of the scriptures and of the liturgy should be investigated with thorough diligence. The Dionysian methods of biblical and liturgical interpretation deserve direct attention in their own right.

This is not to say that the Areopagite's views on the Bible and the liturgy have been completely neglected. Some of the foundational material presented here in Part One has been discussed in other studies, as noted below. In particular, René Roques' *L'Univers Dionysien* has been constitutive for all subsequent research.[8] This encyclopedic work first presents the very notion of a hierarchy, then the angelic hierarchy, and then the human or ecclesiastical hierarchy. Each of these three sections receives its outline from a remark by Pseudo-Dionysius that a hierarchy is order, understanding, and activity.[9] Except for the fourth section, which functions as an appended defense of the Areopagite's Christology, *L'Univers Dionysien* is more a descriptive catalog than a disputable monograph.

As introduced in chapter four and developed thereafter, Dionysian biblical hermeneutics and liturgical exposition share a single framework of interpretive method. While the methodology of the Areopagite's sacramental theory has received some attention from Roques and others,[10] a partnership of biblical and liturgical interpretation is rarely proposed, whether for Dionysius or any other author.[11] Such a proposal will increase the claim for a united corpus from an argument of external harmony in subject matter to one of internal identity in interpretative method. This argument will eventually encompass each Dionysian treatise and its position and role within the structure of the overall corpus. It

[8] *L'Univers Dionysien, Structure hiérarchique du monde selon pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Aubier, 1954). To be cited as *L'Univers*.

[9] To indicate the "plan directeur de la présente étude," Roques quotes from *The Celestial Hierarchy* CH 3 164D 4f.: "La hiérarchie est un *ordre sacré* (τάξις ἱερά), une *science* (ἐπιστήμη) et une *activité* (ἐνέργεια) ..." *L'Univers*, p. 30.

[10] Besides *L'Univers*, pp. 245-302, see "Significations et conditions de la contemplation dionysienne," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 52 (1951): 44-56; and especially "Le sens du Baptême selon le pseudo-Denys," *Irenikon* 31 (1958): 427-449. These articles are reprinted in Roques, *Structures théologiques de la Gnose à Richard de Saint-Victor* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 151-163 and 180-192. This volume will be cited as *Structures*. See also R. Bornert, *Les Commentaires Byzantins de la Divine Liturgie* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1966), "La Mystagogie 'Anagogique' des Alexandrins," "Pseudo-Denys," pp. 66-72.

[11] A striking exception is the brief article by R. Bornert, "Explication de la liturgie et interprétation de l'Écriture chez Maxime le Confesseur," *Studia Patristica* vol. 10, part 1 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970), pp. 323-327. See also below, chapter four, n. 32.

therefore directly opposes the view of Jan Vanneste, who was led to split the corpus in half in his otherwise perceptive pursuit of a most elusive quarry: Pseudo-Dionysian "mysticism." [12]

The writings of this so-called "father of Christian mysticism," argued Vanneste, nowhere testify to a genuinely Christian mystical experience, whether of the author or of his models, Moses, Paul, or Hierotheus. The term "mystical" in the treatise *The Mystical Theology* and throughout the corpus does not indicate the kind of supernatural experience characteristic of later mystics, but only something "mysterious" in the sense of being connected to the mysteries.[13] Far from documenting a supernatural experience, *The Mystical Theology* charts a systematic theory of knowledge which is essentially a series of negations,[14] according to Vanneste. At this point he divided the corpus into two parts: the mind's individual ascent through negations (the "theology" of *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*), and the hierarchy's mediated process of purification, illumination, and perfection (the "theurgy" of *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*).[15] Several years after his first publications, Vanneste repeated most of these conclusions but de-emphasized slightly the strict division within the corpus, and qualified its complete lack of any mystical experience. He acknowledged in Pseudo-Dionysius' mysticism "a faint echo of the original Neoplatonic heritage which he draws upon," [16] meaning Plotinus.

Vanneste's interpretation of *The Mystical Theology* and his division of the corpus represented a sharp challenge to the main lines of Pseudo-Dionysian research. Yet his work has received surprisingly little rebuttal.[17] Perhaps the only full-scale response has been the work of Piero

[12] *Le Mystère de Dieu. Essai sur la structure rationelle de la doctrine mystique du pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite* (Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959). This book will be cited as *Le Mystère de Dieu*. It is summarized in J. Vanneste, "La théologie mystique du pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Studia Patristica* vol. 5, part 3 (Texte und Untersuchungen, 80), (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), pp. 401-415. The article will be cited as "La théologie mystique."

[13] Vanneste, "La théologie mystique," pp. 406-407; *Le Mystère de Dieu*, p. 47. Vanneste's re-examination of the term "mystical" was aided by Louis Bouyer, "Mystique, essai sur l'histoire du mot," *Supplément de la Vie spirituelle* 9 (May 15, 1949). Bouyer's fine discussion of this term in Pseudo-Dionysius is perhaps more accessible in *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963), pp. 406-416.

[14] Vanneste, "La théologie mystique," pp. 404-405.

[15] Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu*, pp. 30-36; "La théologie mystique," pp. 408-411.

[16] J. Vanneste, "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1963): 304.

[17] I. P. Sheldon-Williams acknowledges his dependence upon Vanneste regarding Dionysian theurgy but claims that there is a basic unity to the corpus: "The Pseudo-

Scazzoso for whom the Dionysian corpus is an integral unity, including and indeed permeated by the liturgical context.[18] Although Scazzoso's initial review of Vanneste's *Le Mystère de Dieu* only hinted at this perspective, his later and fuller studies directly opposed the division of the corpus into an individual theology and a hierarchical liturgy.[19] He perceived the Areopagite's liturgical thought as not only "perfectly consistent with his doctrine of unification, simplification, and return upwards," [20] but also as the unifying theme of the entire corpus.[21] Thus Scazzoso denied the isolation of *The Mystical Theology*, whether as a treatise of individual mysticism or a theory of individual knowledge, and insisted upon its close and essential relationship with the rest of the corpus, especially *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: "the liturgy has a fundamental role in *The Mystical Theology*." [22]

Scazzoso's twin convictions, that the corpus is a unity and that the liturgy is essential to the overall Dionysian framework, are fundamental

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Dionysius," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 459 and 471-472. This article agrees with some of the conclusions reached below. Yet in following Vanneste on Dionysian theurgy, Sheldon-Williams seems to overemphasize the efficacy of the liturgical rites for the Pseudo-Areopagite (p. 458). It is argued below that Dionysius transformed not only the term "theurgy" (chapter two), but also a key emphasis in Iamblichean theurgical theory, for he stressed the anagogical value not of the rituals themselves but of their interpretation (chapter seven). Placid Spearritt attacked Vanneste's view of Dionysian theurgy but did not refute his larger argument: *A Philosophical Enquiry into Dionysian Mysticism* (Bösingen: Rotex-Druckdienst, 1975), pp. 10 and 124f.

[18] *Ricerche sulla struttura del linguaggio dello Pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita* (Milan: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1967). To be cited as *Ricerche*. Some of these conclusions were previewed in "Elementi del linguaggio pseudo-dionisiano," *Studia Patristica* vol. 8, part 1 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), pp. 385-400. To be cited as "Elementi." Scazzoso also examined some Dionysian terms for the scriptures: "I rapporti dello Pseudo-Dionigi con la Sacra Scrittura e con S. Paolo," *Aevum* 42 (1968): 1-28.

[19] "Quali siano in corrispondenza di cio i rapporti tra una mistica puramente soggettiva ed una liturgica e sacramentale e fino a che punto questi due aspetti distinti, ma non diversi della spiritualità s'identifichino, solo un approfondimento di tutto il *Corpus* pseudo-dionisiano ci può far scoprire, ed è un lavoro che attende ancora di essere iniziato." *Aevum* 33 (1959): 565; *Ricerche*, p. 128.

[20] "Il tipo di discorso liturgico dello pseudo-Areopagita è perfettamente coerente alla sua dottrina dell'unificazione, semplificazione e riconduzione verso l'alto." "Valore della liturgia nelle opere dello Pseudo-Dionigi," *La Scuola Cattolica* 93 (1965): 142.

[21] For an exaggerated version of this claim, see Scazzoso, "Elementi," p. 398.

[22] "Invece, pur non apparendo a prima vista, la liturgia ha una parte fondamentale nella MTh," *Ricerche*, p. 161; see this entire comparison (pp. 152-165) of the language of *The Mystical Theology* with that of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Scazzoso alludes to a liturgical character of Moses' ascent as it is described in *The Mystical Theology*, chapter one (*Ricerche*, pp. 161f.), but he provides none of the details pursued below in chapter nine.

to the argument advanced below. Yet his thesis could have been expanded, and the response to Vanneste strengthened, by pursuing biblical interpretation along with liturgical concerns. Scazzoso wished to link *The Mystical Theology* directly to *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Proposed below is the mediation, between these subjects and these treatises, of *The Celestial Hierarchy* and the entire field of biblical interpretation. Vanneste neglected completely what Scazzoso could have pursued further, the relationship between the ascent of the mind through negations, addressed most directly in *The Mystical Theology*, and the "uplifting" or anagogical understanding of both biblical and liturgical symbols in the two hierarchical treatises.[23]

In summary, this study is indebted to the basic insights and suggestions of many fine scholars, especially René Roques and Piero Scazzoso. Its intended contribution is a presentation of the Areopagite's biblical and liturgical material within a single framework, indeed one which reveals a certain unity to the entire corpus. On a secondary, historiographical level, it attempts to weave the insights of Vanneste's argument into the larger texture of Pseudo-Dionysian studies. Could the Areopagite's corpus be only a cold, cognitive principle of affirmation and negation, devoid of personal experience, even though centuries of readers have found guidance in it for their own spiritual elevation? The bond between "cold" rational cognition and "warm" spiritual ascent is provided by not only the echo of Neoplatonic religious experience, but also the patristic tradition of biblical (and liturgical) hermeneutics. The ancient and medieval view of scriptural and ritual symbols involved both subtle theories of the cognitive process and the conviction that this process was not just a matter of human will and skill but a spiritual journey through the symbols to God.

Lest the reader unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Dionysian vocabulary feel that our presentation of that journey is unnecessarily delayed by the detailed terminological concerns of the next few chapters, one example may suffice. When this wordsmith Dionysius writes that "theurgy is the consummation of theology," [24] the reader is little helped by

[23] Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu*, p. 198. Scazzoso sometimes separated negative theology too drastically from biblical and liturgical interpretation (e.g., "Elementi," pp. 392-396), perhaps because he saw "l'apofatismo" not as part of an interpretive method, but as an experiential "religious attitude" toward the sacred (*Ricerche*, p. 114). This separation of scriptural, ritual and apophatic themes is also the weakness of a more recent work which follows the general directions of Scazzoso: Alfredo Brontesi, *L'incontro misterioso con Dio, saggio sulla Teologia affermativa e negativa nello Pseudo-Dionigi* (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 1970).

[24] Or "the divine works are the consummation of the divine words," EH 3 432B 22f.; see chapter two, notes 11-13.

the Neoplatonic distinction used by Vanneste, and still less by definitions which spring to the modern mind. In perfect harmony with his own understanding of the terms "theurgy" and "theology," the Areopagite is playfully summarizing his discussion of the relationship of the New Testament to the Old!

2

The Areopagite's Bible

The thought and works of this Dionysius are dominated by a spiritual ascent experienced partly in the interpretation of the scriptures. Yet the centrality of his biblical exegesis and its essentially spiritual and experiential nature are easily neglected. The foundational topics for a fuller appreciation of Pseudo-Dionysian biblical hermeneutics include the author's unusual and sometimes misleading terminology for the scriptures and their authors, and his own statements regarding the role of the Bible in his corpus.[1]

A. The Scriptures

A formal list of the biblical writings which the Areopagite considered canonical appears nowhere in his writings. Even though the canon of the scriptures was firmly established at the time of his actual writing, our unknown author could not reflect any such precision without jeopardizing his pseudonym. Nevertheless, at least part of his canon can be observed in his discussion of the scriptures which are read during worship, after the Psalms.

> The sacred scriptural tablets ... teach that God himself thus gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists, including the legal hierarchy and society. They lay down the divisions by lot, the distribution and the sharing that have to do with God's people. They teach the lore of holy

[1] Both Roques and W. Völker have contributed significantly to the subject of this chapter. For example, see Roques' fine treatment of the Dionysian names for and descriptions of the scriptures (*L'Univers Dionysien*, pp. 210-225). In Völker's overall perspective, the Areopagite stands firmly in an Alexandrian and Cappadocian tradition of Church Fathers. Thus his thorough treatment of the Dionysian vocabulary for the scriptures and their authors emphasizes the patristic precedents: *Kontemplation und Ekstase bei Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1958), pp. 84-92. To be cited as *Kontemplation*.

judges, of wise kings and of priests who live in God. They express the powerful and unshakeable point of view which enabled our forefathers to endure various and numerous misfortunes. From them come wise guidelines for living, the songs which gloriously depict the love of God, the prophecies regarding the future, the divine works of Jesus the man, the god-given and god-imitating communities and sacred teachings of his disciples. Here is the hidden and mystical vision of that inspired man who was the most beloved of the disciples, and the transcendent Word of God concerning Jesus.[2]

To consider first the allusions to Old Testament books, the phrase "substance and arrangement" clearly refers to Genesis. The "legal hierarchy and society" points to Exodus and Leviticus, respectively, since the former concerns the giving of the law and the latter presents certain ritual and societal regulations.[3] The "divisions by lot" are described in Numbers. The "lore of holy judges, of wise kings and of priests" is found in Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings (1 and 2 Chronicles?), and Ezra and Nehemiah, respectively. The "powerful and unshakeable point of view" suggests a Job-like steadfastness even though the plural, "forefathers," does not confirm this identification. "Wise guidelines" are found in Proverbs while the "songs" are clearly the Song of Solomon. The expression "prophecies regarding the future" simply covers the prophets without any specific identification.

Not only did our author leave no commentaries or homilies on these or any other specific books or texts, but his many scriptural quotations and allusions also invariably omit the name of the biblical book. The reader must identify each citation individually and then compile the data.[4] Yet

[2] EH 3 429CD 26-44.

[3] This expression, "the legal hierarchy," generally refers to the organization of the Israelite community under Moses, as discussed below in chapter three.

[4] The exception is the naming of Genesis in Ep. 9 1105B 22. The Corderius edition in Migne is quite deficient regarding the identification of scriptural quotations and allusions. Nor is the standard index a corrective. The *Indices Pseudo-Dionysiani* by Alb. van den Daele (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1941) provide an index to biblical passages (pp. 151-153) simply by compiling the Corderius notes. Although generally reliable, even that process was not without error; for example, the note "Jud. 6" at DN 4 725A 9f. was entered in the index as Judges 6 instead of Jude 6.

The evidence gathered in the course of the current study indicates a far greater use of the scriptures than one would conclude from the notes by Corderius. The corpus contains perhaps half again as many quotations as the Migne edition identifies and approximately three times as many quotations and allusions in all. The evidence partially summarized in subsequent notes will be published in detail in an index to the English translation of the entire corpus forthcoming from Paulist Press (The Classics of Western Spirituality).

this type of compilation yields only limited, statistical information.[5] Of more specific interest regarding the author's canon is his clear citation of the Wisdom of Solomon as scriptural. One reference to the Wisdom of Solomon is prefaced by the unusual expression, "in the introductory scriptures." [6] This term "introductory," a hapax legomenon in the corpus, can be understood in two ways. Either the book is not in the author's canon and is thus introductory to the canonical scriptures, or, as canonical Old Testament, it is preparatory to the New Testament. The latter option is more likely, given another reference to the Wisdom of Solomon where it is cited in the same way that canonical scripture is cited throughout the corpus, namely, "as scripture says." [7]

Regarding the New Testament, the passage quoted above included four topics. The expression "the divine works of Jesus the man" refers to the gospels, but their names and number are not specified. The disciples' "communities and sacred teachings" suggest at least their activity and preaching in the Acts of the Apostles although perhaps the teachings of certain unnamed epistles could also be intended. The beloved disciple's vision could only be the Revelation of St. John. The phrase "the transcendent Word of God concerning Jesus" is more enigmatic, both for its vocabulary and also for its location in this otherwise canonically sequential list. On the one hand, the otherworldliness of this "theology" of Jesus provides a contrast to the humanity previously emphasized, perhaps hinting at a distinction between the Gospel of John and the Synoptics. On the other hand, a self-styled convert of the Apostle Paul might be expected

[5] The approximative and conservative totals of Old Testament quotations, divine names, and allusions: Genesis, 22; Exodus, 34; Leviticus, 3; Numbers, 14; Deuteronomy, 18; Joshua, 2; Judges, 3; 1 Samuel, 7; 2 Samuel, 5; 1 Kings, 6; 2 Kings, 6; 1 Chronicles, 2; 2 Chronicles, 5; Nehemiah, 1; Job, 10; Psalms, 91; Proverbs, 10; Song of Solomon, 8; Isaiah, 46; Jeremiah, 11; Ezekiel, 46; Daniel, 28; Hosea, 9; Amos, 2; Jonah, 1; Micah, perhaps 1; Habakkuk, 1; Zechariah, 12; Malachi, 8.

[6] *ἐν ταῖς προεισαγωγιαῖς τῶν λογίων*, DN 4 709B 15, regarding Wisdom of Solomon 8.2.

[7] DN 7 872C 30, regarding Wisdom of Solomon 8.1. Wisdom of Solomon 7.13 may stand behind CH 13 301C 41 and EH 4 481C 26. Other questionable possibilities include Wisdom of Solomon 2.2 at EH 2 404B 12-15 and EH 7 553B 23f., 3.6 at Ep. 9 1105A 14, 5.1 at EH 7 556A, 7.22 at DN 7 872B 21, 7.24 at CH 13 300D 33 to 301A 2, 7.26 at CH 3 165A 6f., and DN 4 717D 45-47, 7.27 at DN 1 596B 27, 8.1 at DN 7 827B 22-25, and 18.3 at CH 2 144D 41f.

As for other references to the Apocrypha, the author considered "Susannah" part of the canonical Daniel and cites Susannah 42 in DN 1 596B 20 and DN 7 869A 12-14. Other, more questionable possibilities include Baruch 3.3 at DN 9 909B 23, Baruch 4.8 at DN 1 596B 18, Sirach 3.22 at DN 3 684C 29-31 and Ep. 8 1092A 2f., Sirach 23.19 at DN 1 597B 14, and 2 Maccabees 1.25 at DN 1 596B 19. Extremely doubtful are the references by Corderius to Tobiat 8 and 9 at Ep. 8 1085C 39f., and to 2 Maccabees 3.26 at CH 2 137A 12f.

to give pride of place to his master's writings, or at least to mention them more explicitly. In actual practice nearly every book of the New Testament is cited, with the Gospel and Revelation of John receiving the most frequent usage.[8]

The Old and New Testaments are cited or alluded to with great and roughly equal frequency.[9] A different discussion of the scriptural readings in the liturgy posits the relationship between the two testaments as prediction and event. The readings are from both the "older tradition" which "forecast the divine works of Jesus" and also the "new testament" which "completed" these works. "The one wrote truth by way of images, while the other described things as they happened." [10] While this position seems rather conventional, the Pseudo-Areopagite's exegesis is largely devoid of a typological relationship between the testaments.

The passage's final remark illustrates the unusual terminology of the corpus: "theurgy is the consummation of theology." [11] The Pseudo-Areopagite transformed the term "theurgy" from the objective genitive of *The Chaldean Oracles* and Iamblichus, i.e., "the work of God" as a work addressed toward the gods, to a subjective genitive suggesting God's own work.[12] This use of "theurgy" and derivatives applies both to God's saving work as a whole, as praised during the synaxis, for example, and also to

[8] The approximate and conservative totals of New Testament quotations, divine names, and allusions: Matthew, 38; Mark, 8; Luke, 36; John, 46; Acts, 10; Romans, 21; 1 Corinthians, 29; 2 Corinthians, 6; Galatians, 4; Ephesians, 15; Philippians, 2; Colossians, 16; 1 Thessalonians, 3; 2 Thessalonians, perhaps 1; 1 Timothy, 17; 2 Timothy, 5; Titus, 1; Hebrews, 28; James, 5; 1 Peter, 2; 2 Peter, 1; 1 John, 8; 2 John, none; 3 John, 3; Jude, 2; Revelation, 42.

[9] There are approximately three hundred and eighty-five references to the Old Testament and three hundred and forty-five to the New. The figures by testament and by treatise, again approximate and conservative, are as follows:

OT:	DN, 100;	MT, 5;	CH, 150;	EH, 30;	Epp. 100.
NT:	DN, 132;	MT, 2;	CH, 80;	EH, 51;	Epp. 80.
Totals:	DN, 232;	MT, 7;	CH, 230;	EH, 81	Epp. 180.

[10] EH 3 432AB 9-23.

[11] τῆς θεολογίας ἡ θεουργία συγκεφαλαίωσις, EH 3 432B 22f. See also EH 5 513C 34.

[12] Iamblichus contrasted "theology" and "theurgy" as words *versus* works directed to the divine. *de Mysteriis* 1.2, 7.2-6 (*Les Mystères d'Égypte*, ed. E. des Places [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1966]), to be cited hereafter as "dM." Hans Lewy, *The Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, new edition by Michel Tardieu (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), (Cairo: L'institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1958); pp. 461-463; to be cited as *The Chaldean Oracles*. Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), Part Two. Piero Scazzoso, "La terminologia misterica nel Corpus Pseudo-Areopagitico," *Aevum* 37 (1963): 416.

his specific divine acts in Christ.[13] The word "theology," on the other hand, usually means the "word of God" in the sense of canonical scripture, as taken up below. Thus, more in the spirit of a play on words than serious definitions, "theurgy is the consummation of theology" really means that the divine works or events of the New Testament are the consummation of the divine words or predictions of the Old.

Thus our first conclusion from this data is methodological: to discern the Areopagite's meaning, his creative yet consistent terminology must be given direct and careful attention. Second, all of the above information on the author's canon is extremely limited; this too is suggestive. The main reason why a detailed analysis of the author's canon is impossible may be his intention to remain true to the pseudonym. But his vagueness also results, perhaps intentionally, in a fluid and open-ended view of the scriptures. This preliminary observation can be tested and specified during an examination of his terms for the scriptures and the biblical writers.

The pseudo-Areopagite used two principal expressions to designate the books of the Old and New Testaments: the "scriptures" (*τὰ λόγια*) and the "word of God," or rather, to transliterate instead of translate, "theology" (*θεολογία*). Generally speaking, other terms can refer to the Bible only when accompanied by one of these special names. In the two locations where the word "writing" signifies the biblical material, the contexts and qualifiers make the meaning plain. Without such qualifications, however, the author never uses this term to mean the Bible, despite considerable patristic precedent.[14] Similarly, the term "tradition" can, with appropriate specification, refer to the biblical material, e.g., "the tradition(s) of the scriptures" and "our 'theological' tradition," although its normal context is liturgical.[15] The author occasionally refers to scripture as "the sacred word." [16] Otherwise, these minor terms for the Bible are completely dependent upon the two major designations, "the scriptures" and "the word of God."

[13] EH 3 436C 41, 440B 27, 440C 29, 441D 46, 445B 22, 445C 28; specifically Christological: EH 3 429C 38f., 432B 18, 441C 34 and 39.

[14] The term *γραφή* means the scriptures in EH 1 372C 40f., and EH 3 432C 31f. Nonscriptural uses appear in EH 1 376C 31, EH 7 565C 31, and DN 4 708D 42. Cf. Irenaeus, *ad haer.*, 1.1.3. (PG 7: 452A); Origen, *de Princ.*, 4.1.1. (PG 11: 341B) and 4.2.4. (11: 365A).

[15] With "scriptures": CH 4 180D 43f., cf. CH 2 140C 29f., CH 5 196B 15f., CH 14 321A 3, EH 2 404C 26f., Ep. 9 1113C 30; the "theological" tradition: DN 2 640D 41f., cf. EH 3 432B 15, EH 7 561A 5, and Ep. 9 1105D 46f. See below, chapter four, n. 14, and Völker, *Kontemplation*, pp. 90f.

[16] CH 1 121A 2, DN 2 637A 13, DN 4 708A 5; see also DN 2 637A 4, DN 7 872D 43, and Ep. 7 1080C 30.

The Areopagite's most frequent introduction to a direct or indirect biblical quotation is the expression "as the scriptures say." [17] There are several variations on this pattern, including the less frequent singular form.[18] Even apart from these quotation formulae, the term "scriptures" is a common designation for the biblical writings in general.[19] Of course, the word λόγιον had a considerable history before Pseudo-Dionysius. On the one hand, the New Testament itself uses the plural form to mean the "oracles" of God, which in Romans 3.2 clearly refer to the Old Testament.[20] Furthermore, the early church Fathers employed it often, first for the Old Testament, and then for the entire Bible or a particular reading of scripture.[21] On the other hand, the word was used in other religious movements to refer to their authoritative writings, especially *The Chaldean Oracles*. This non-Christian precedent was noted at the very beginning of modern Pseudo-Dionysian scholarship.[22] One such non-scriptural reference appears in the Areopagite's own corpus when he calls "The Elements of Theology" of Hierotheus, his presumed mentor, "scriptures" which are "second only to the divinely-anointed scriptures themselves." [23] Yet this use of the term is so clearly qualified that no confusion of the work of Hierotheus with the canonical scriptures is possible. The exception, with such severe qualification, proves the rule. Similarly, the references to other authors such as Bartholomew, Clement, or Justus are markedly different in format from the citations of the scriptures.[24] The absence of a clearly defined canon does not mean that

[17] κατὰ τὰ λόγια: CH 2 140B 19, 145C 36, CH 3 165B 25, CH 7 212C 35f., EH 1 376C 35, EH 3 440A 1, 441C 36, EH 4 481A 5, EH 5 512C 30, 512C 37, EH 7 557A 2f., 561C 39f., 561D 46f., 564B 30, 564C 38, DN 4 700A 13f., 725A 9f., DN 5 816C 24f., DN 7 872C 30, MT 1 1000C 33f., Ep. 8 1088C 39, 1093B 23, 1093D 46.

[18] κατὰ τὸ λόγιον: EH 3 441C 41f., EH 4 473C 44, 484A 13f., 484D 44, EH 5 501B 23, DN 1 592C 30, 596C 37f., DN 7 865B 21, 869A 13, 872B 20; cf. EH 4 484B 24. For other variants, see EH 3 445C 29, DN 7 865B 20, 868D 45, and 869C 37.

[19] In general: CH 4 181C 29, EH 3 440C 33, DN 1 592B 17 and 21, DN 2 640A 2, 640B 18, DN 4 697B 18f., 736A 12f., Ep. 9 1104B 9; "from the scriptures": DN 1 597B 20f., DN 2 640A 4, 640B 21; "in the scriptures": CH 2 136D 7f., 137B 24, CH 15 328B 24f., 340B 23; the scriptures as physical objects placed on the hierarch's head during his ordination: EH 5 509C 35 and 513C 28.

[20] Other references include Acts 7:38, Hebrews 5:12, and 1 Peter 4:11.

[21] Old Testament: 1 Clement 53.1 and 62.3; Clement, *Stromata* 7.18 (Migne PG 9: 556A); and Origen, PG 13: 357B. Entire Bible: Eusebius, *de vita Constantini* (PG 20: 1053B); Athanasius, *exp. Ps.* (PG 27: 61A); and Chrysostom, *hom.* 84.3 (PG 59: 23). A particular reading: Athanasius, *Ar.* 1.46 (PG 26: 108); Gregory of Nyssa, *anima et res* (PG 40: 13A) and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.16.3.

[22] But the claims of conceptual dependence were not as persuasive. H. Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, pp. 38-49, especially p. 46. Lewy, *The Chaldean Oracles*, Excursus I, p. 454.

[23] ὥσπερ τινὰ δεύτερα λόγια καὶ τῶν θεοχρίστων ἀκόλουθα, DN 3 681B 27f.

[24] MT 1 1000B 21, DN 5 824D 45, DN 11 949A 15.

any other writing or author, even Hierotheus, was treated like the scriptures. This distinction, however, is less clearly drawn when the second major term for the Bible is in view.

Our author generally used the term "theology" and its cognates in the specific etymological sense of "the word of God," namely, the Bible.[25] When a direct biblical quotation is introduced by the expression, "as theology says," the translation "word of God" becomes appropriate.[26] When the Pseudo-Areopagite writes that "theology" teaches or names something, a closer look at the context confirms that this "God-word" is really a book of the Bible.[27] For example, the twelfth chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy* first asks why a certain cleric can be called an angel "by the scriptures" and then goes on to explain that "theology" can call humans angels or even gods.[28] Similarly, the adjective "theological" often means "biblical," as in *The Ninth Letter*'s discussion of theological symbols, namely those in the scriptures.[29] A "theological project" is a "scriptural endeavor" or even a biblical book, while the "theological" tablets are the biblical writings, and the "theological name of being" is a scriptural name for God.[30]

While the term "theology" is in these cases synonymous with "the scriptures," it can also carry a slightly different meaning. The Areopagite can also use the word "theology" to indicate the message or contents of the Bible, namely the scriptures as interpreted. The work entitled "The Symbolic Theology," for example, is described as the interpretation of

[25] This observation is well established in such standard Pseudo-Dionysian studies as R. Roques, "Note sur la notion de THEOLOGIA selon le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 25 (1949): 200-212. This essay was reprinted with added bibliographical notes in Roques, *Structures*, pp. 135-145. For the larger history of the term, see A. J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermes Trismégiste* (Paris: Le Coffre, 1949), 2: 598-605: "Pour l'histoire du mot *θεολογία*." See also O. Semmelroth, "Die *θεολογία συμβολική* des Ps. Dionysius Areopagita," *Scholastik* 27 (1952): 1-11. Semmelroth's various articles seem based on his unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Das ausstrahlende und emporziehende Licht. Die Theologie des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in systematischer Darstellung" (Typescript, University Library, Bonn, 1947). Yet Semmelroth, and others, seemed to abstract the Dionysian "theology" too freely from its original and concrete context in the interpretation of the scriptures.

[26] CH 4 180B 20; cf. CH 9 261C 38 and DN 5 824D 49. This same formula appears without a direct quotation but with a clear scriptural referent EH 3 437B 22f., EH 5 501C 39f., DN 10 937D 45.

[27] CH 7 212A 14, EH 1 372A 9, 373C 35, Ep. 8 1085C 40; EH 4 481C 33, DN 5 824C 41. For other references, see CH 15 328C 37, 332C 42, 336B 21, DN 1 588A 12, DN 2 636C 6-9, and Ep. 8 1085B 27.

[28] CH 12 292C 7f., 293AB 7-15.

[29] Ep. 9 1104B 9. See below, chapter four.

[30] DN 1 589D 42f. and DN 3 681A 6f.; EH 1 376C 27; DN 5 816B 4.

scriptural symbols.[31] Similarly, "The Theological Representations" is a treatise presenting and interpreting the scriptural affirmations about God.[32] These affirmations constitute "affirmative" or "cataphatic theology," another expression designating the scriptures as interpreted.[33] The author seems to use "theology" to mean both a word by God and a word about God. This second use can mean a discourse about God in the scriptures, such as Peter's confession or John's revelation.[34] But it also opens the way for a broader usage, such as the author's own words about God.[35] All human discourse concerning God, however, is based upon, and an interpretation of, the biblical "God-word." [36] Thus in one text "our theological tradition" is not the Bible itself but its subsequent interpretation, for this tradition's leaders are said to follow the scriptures.[37] Such terminology also manages to suggest a scriptural content to Hierotheus' treatise, "The Elements of Theology" although the point is never pursued.[38] That "theology" can mean not just the scriptures themselves but also the interpreted scriptural message is confirmed by the Areopagite's discussion of a "theological understanding" [39] on the part of the angels, for they clearly have no need of the scriptures in their written form.

In summary, one could say that the term "scriptures" always indicates the writings themselves while "theology" or "the word of God" often means the basic message which these writings contain. The importance of this terminological foundation will soon be clear. The author's negative or mystical "theology," for example, is not a general theory of spiritual knowledge but a specific method of interpreting the scriptures.

B. Their Authorship

The Areopagite used several terms for the scripture writers, principally a variation on "theology," namely, "theologian." Of the minor terms, the

[31] Ep. 9 1104B 8-10 and 1113C; cf. CH 15 336A 3, DN 1 597B 19, DN 4 700C 38, DN 9 913B 22f., DN 13 984A 11, MT 3 1033A 14, 1033B 26.

[32] DN 2 640B 20-22 and 644D 41ff.; cf. DN 1 585B 10, 593B 15f., DN 2 636C 16, DN 11 953B 18, MT 3 1033B 24.

[33] MT 3 1032D 3 to 1033A 11; cf. DN 1 589D to 591A.

[34] EH 7 564C 38 and Ep. 10 1120A 2; cf. EH 3 429D 42f. See Roques, *L'Univers*, p. 210.

[35] DN 3 681A 4f.

[36] DN 1 588A 2-5, 588C 31-34.

[37] DN 2 640D 41-46.

[38] DN 2 648A 12, 648B 23-26, DN 3 681A 2f. Did Hierotheus "theologize" in DN 3 684A 4?

[39] CH 7 212B 27 and DN 2 640A 6; cf. CH 10 273B 19, DN 3 684B 21, DN 8 893B 20. Regarding the angels' knowledge, see EH 1 376BC and chapter five below, nn. 89-91.

adjective "theosophos" appears four times in the corpus, each time as a substantive plural, i.e., "those filled with divine wisdom," and each time designating the writers of scripture. These divine wise men name the divine cause from its effects, such as life and light, etc., and protect the "holy of holies" from the uninitiated by using dishonorable and incongruous images.[40] While Dionysius also employed the term "prophet" to mean certain authors of the scriptures, the word is not primarily associated with the books of the prophets. Isaiah is called a prophet only once but a "theologian" many times.[41] When Zechariah's son is called a prophet of Jesus, the reference is to oral prophecy rather than any canonical book.[42] Some "initiates and prophets" contributed visions to the data on the divine names but they are not necessarily to be identified with the writers themselves.[43] The term "prophet" does indicate a biblical author in one stylized expression with three identical occurrences in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: the sacred song which God inspired in the prophets," i.e., the Alleluia.[44] This expression refers not primarily to the canonical books of the prophets, but to the Psalms where "alleluias" are certainly frequent.[45]

The Pseudo-Areopagite's most frequent term for the human authors of the scriptures is also a derivative of "theology" in the sense of "God's word," namely "the theologians." While this transliteration is convenient, it does not capture the consistent meaning of the term, namely, a human author of the biblical writings.[46] Biblical writers explicitly termed "theologians" include Paul, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Peter, and Isaiah.[47] When

[40] DN 1 596A 13-16 and CH 2 145A 4, where οὕτω refers both θεόσοφοι and ὑποφῆται back to the previous subject in CH 2 144C 34, the "theologians." For the other two references to θεόσοφοι as scripture writers, see CH 9 261A 8 and CH 15 329C 36.

[41] CH 13 300B 15; cf. 300A 3.

[42] CH 4 181B 16; cf. Ep. 8 1085A 7. For Isaiah as a "theologian," see note 47 below.

[43] DN 1 597A 9. Neither μύστης nor ἱερομύστης ever indicates a scripture writer; see chapter three, n. 25, for their usual context.

[44] τὸ ἱερὸν τῆς τῶν θεολήπτων προφητῶν ἐπιπνοίας μελῴδημα EH 2 396C 33f., EH 4 473A 9f., and 485AB 15-21.

[45] In DN 2 637A 5 the expression refers to Psalm 143:10. "Interpreter" (ὑποφήτης) may also be used to designate a scripture writer, echoing "prophet" (CH 13 300B 19 and EH 3 429C 38, cf. CH 2 145A 4 in n. 40 above), but it can also mean the hierarch (EH 7 564A 7) or the priests (Ep. 8 1088C 40).

[46] C. E. Rolt, *The Divine Names* (London: SPCK, 1920), freely but accurately uses "Sacred Writer" while Gandillac shifted from "theologien" (*Œuvres Complètes*, e.g., pp. 188, 191, 193, and 201f.) to "porte-parole de Dieu" (*La Hiérarchie Céleste*, e.g., pp. 75, 80, 83, and 101; see p. 67 for his discussion of the term). The latter French translation conveys both the Greek term itself and also its actual meaning, as would the less elegant English expression, "God's spokesperson."

[47] Paul: DN 8 893B 14 and 893C 35; Zechariah: CH 8 241A 3 and 12; Ezekiel: CH 8 241A

something is said or praised by "the theologians," Dionysius is referring to the biblical writers, even though he rarely includes the type of direct quotation associated with the term "scripture."[48] Yet here too there is a broader use of the term. The expression "the greatest of our theologians"[49] may be intended to portray the author amid the New Testament authors, but it also leaves open the question whether "God's spokespersons" were absolutely confined to a closed canon. The overall picture gained so far from the author's canon and the terminology he used for the scriptures and their writers suggests that the biblical material cannot be isolated as a well-defined and self-contained unit, but is rather inseparable from the interpretation of it.

This preliminary conclusion leads to the larger question of authorship and the role of God in the origin of the scriptures. The Pseudo-Areopagite never claims such a role directly, nor does he frame his quotations with any decisive expressions such as "God says" or 'the thearchy wrote." Rather, those who say or write in scriptures are almost always the human authors.[50] Furthermore, the corpus contains no explicit doctrine of a unique inspiration of the scriptures. The term "inspiration" does appear and even, on occasion, in conjunction with the scriptures.[51] Yet it designates not a specifically scriptural inspiration as in Origen, but a general gift of inspiration which is rarely, in fact, specified as biblical.[52]

In addition to the absence of any explicit treatment of the ultimate source or authorship of the scriptures, only indirect and inconclusive evidence is gained from noting the various adjectives used to describe them. Their characterization as "true" or "intelligible" contributes little to this question.[53] The scriptures are often called "divine," but so are assorted

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14 and CH 15 337D 49; Peter: DN 3 681D 47; cf. Ep. 10 1117A 2 for the inclusion of John in this list in the title of *The Tenth Letter*. The references to Isaiah are all in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter thirteen: CH 13 300B 5 and 13, 300C 26, 304B 22, 304C 31, 305A 1 and 14, 305B 30, 305C 37, and 305D 46.

[48] CH 10 273B 17, DN 4 712C 29, DN 9 913C 30, 916C 25, cf. CH 8 241C 39; DN 1 596A 1, DN 8 889C 6 and 14, cf. DN 1 589D 39, DN 4 701C 25, 724A 1; the "theologians" also call (CH 5 196B 6, 196C 21), regard (DN 4 709B 20), denote (CH 7 209A 3), view (Ep. 9 1108B 23), honor (DN 1 597A 5) and depict (CH 15 329A 29) as scripture writers.

[49] *οἱ κράτιστοι τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν θεολόγων* DN 13 981C 28.

[50] For the exceptions where the divine "writes," see CH 1 124A 6-12, DN 1 588C 34f., 589B 20f.

[51] *ἐπίπνοια*: DN 11 953B 20; cf. CH 2 145A 4.

[52] CH 2 145B 30, CH 15 332A 14, EH 3 440C 35, 445B 17, EH 4 481D 40. Thrice the term is associated with the "alleluia" (EH 2 396C 34, EH 4 473A 10, 485A 15-17). DN 2 648B 17 is considered below, chapter nine, n. 2. For Origen, see *de Princ.* 4.2.2 (PG 11: 360B).

[53] "True": EH 7 557D 45f., 561D 48, DN 1 588A 11; cf. "the truth of the scriptures"

names, objects, and people.[54] The scriptures are very frequently designated "sacred" or "most sacred," but this term also receives such wide application that its use here yields no specific conclusion.[55] The scriptural "tablets" are also described as "holy-written,"[56] but this expression also stops short of saying "divinely written." Nor are the scriptures ever called "inspired" in the technical sense that Origen used for some Old Testament prophecies.[57] Instead, the word (ἔνθεος, "enthused") is simply another way of saying "divine" or "sacred" in general, and is widely applied to various persons, to the hierarchs, to knowledge or teachings, and to life or a way of life.[58] It is in this general sense that the word "inspired" is once applied to the reading of the scriptures yet still without indicating a formal doctrine of inspiration.[59]

The relationship of the Bible to God is more directly addressed by the designation "divinely transmitted" or "handed down by God." The term was rare among both patristic authors and Neoplatonists until Proclus, who used it frequently.[60] The Pseudo-Areopagite often referred to the scriptures in this way, particularly when interpreting their placement

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in CH 2 141C 33f., DN 1 592C 39, DN 2 640A 7, DN 4 721C 27, 736B 18. "Intelligibile": CH 12 292C 4, DN 3 681C 32f., Ep. 9 1108C 40, 1112A 12.

[54] EH 2 392A 6, EH 7 556C 34, DN 1 589D 37, DN 2 637C 36f., DN 4 709A 6, DN 8 889C 11, Ep. 9 1112A; "most divine": EH 4 473A 6; "thearchical": DN 1 588A 9. Besides the many divine names, which are really names for the divine, there is the divine altar (EH 3 425B 24, EH 5 509D 41), the divine myron (EH 4 473D 45, 484A 8 and 12), the divine leaders (EH 4 476C 35 and EH 6 532D 46), and the divine hierarch (EH 1 373C 32f., EH 2 400B 16, EH 3 425C 39f., 429A 15f., 441C 37, EH 7 556D 42f.).

[55] "Sacred": CH 2 145B 25, CH 6 201A 4, DN 1 588A 5, 588C 33f., 589B 14 and 21, DN 2 636C 6f., 640D 46, 645B 22, DN 7 872C 26, Ep. 8 1089D 50, 1096A 11; cf. DN 2 649D 41f. and Ep. 9 1108C 29. "Most sacred": CH 1 121A 7, CH 4 180C 30, EH 1 372A 1; cf. EH 1 373C 40f., and EH 3 432C 31f. The scriptures can also be called "most holy" (EH 1 376B 25 and DN 10 940A 4) and "other-worldly" (EH 1 372A 1) without involving an argument for divine authorship.

[56] ἁγιόγραφος EH 1 376C 27, EH 3 425C 28, 429C 29.

[57] *Contra Celsum* 3.7 (PG 11: 929A), 6.46 (1369D), 7.10 (1433C), 7.11 (1436C); *De Princ.* 4.1.6 (PG 11: 352B).

[58] Persons: EH 1 373C 37, EH 2 401A 2, EH 4 476B 22, EH 5 501A 5, EH 7 561C 38, DN 1 592B 18. Hierarchs: CH 5 196C 26, EH 1 376C 32, EH 3 440C 32, EH 5 505B 14, 505C 33, 505D 42, EH 7 564C 41. Knowledge or teachings: EH 2 396A 11, 400B 15f., EH 3 424C 7f., 445A 7f. "Life": EH 2 396A 1; πολιτεία: EH 2 396A 5, EH 3 441C 31, Ep. 9 1113A 1f. The term ἔνθεος also appears with "subsistence" in EH 3 432D 41f. and EH 4 484B 25f., with "hierarchy" in EH 5 513C 30, and with "order" in EH 3 432B 16f.

[59] EH 3 432C 31f.

[60] Koch (*Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 44) notes the term θεοπαράδοτος in Proclus: *prov. et fat.* 1.53; *in Crat.* 64; *Tim.* 97B, p. 238; *Remp.* 78, *In Parm.* 4.14. W. Völker (*Kontemplation*, p. 87, n. 7) concedes that the term is not in Origen or Gregory of Nyssa, but finds it in Eusebius.

upon the hierarch's head during his ordination.[61] In this case the term reinforces the hierarchical nature of the transmission of the scriptures: handed down from God, they are passed on to the human orders only through the mediation of the hierarch.[62] On the one hand, the term might assume a divine origin of the scriptures, since in the Areopagite's hierarchical system what God passes down could originate only within the divinity. On the other hand, even with its suggestion of a divine origin, the designation is not restricted to the scriptures but is broadly applied to such things as "understanding," "a way of life," and "order." [63] Thus neither this term nor any other Pseudo-Dionysian expression documents a unique and exclusive inspiration of the scriptures.

C. The Role of the Bible

Dionysius was eager to present his work as a faithful interpretation of the Bible. This claim took two forms. First of all, several treatises are presented as direct expositions of the scriptures, although not in the form of commentaries or homilies. Whether lost or fictitious, "The Theological Representations" concerns a specific set of biblical subjects, claims Dionysius, and "other revelations of scripture." [64]

Another supposedly lost work, "The Symbolic Theology," purports to consider the forms and shapes ascribed to God in the Bible, as the title suggests, and to agree with "the sacred tradition and the truth of scripture." [65] Since scriptural shapes and forms for the divinity are also the subject of *The Ninth Letter*, "The Symbolic Theology" is either summarized therein or was never written at all, with the letter serving as a subtle substitution.[66] *The Celestial Hierarchy*, furthermore, is not simply a treatise on the angels in general, but rather a presentation of their descriptions in the Bible, as the reader is informed or reminded in several strategic locations:

[61] τὰ θεοπαράδοτα λόγια: EH 1 376B 22-24, EH 7 561C 42, cf. EH 1 377A 8f.; in ordination: EH 5 509B 11f., 513C 33, 516B 22f., EH 6 533B 17, 533C 33.

[62] See especially EH 5 513CD.

[63] EH 5 513 41, EH 3 429C 39f., EH 6 536D 46, and Ep. 8 1088C 36f.; for further occurrences of the term, see also EH 2 396B 21, EH 3 424D 25, 441D 45, and EH 4 485A 7.

[64] MT 3 1033A 9f. The title itself could be translated as "The Scriptural Representations." For fuller discussion of these treatises and their place in the corpus, see below, chapter eight.

[65] Ep. 9 1113C 30f.; summarized in MT 3 1033AB 14-22; cf. DN 9 913A 12-20.

[66] This is the suggestion of Ronald F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy*, pp. 67-68, 79.

> I have therefore nothing of my own to say about all this and I am content merely to set down, as well as I can, what it was that the sacred theologians contemplated of the angelic sights and what they shared with us about it.[67]

Similarly, *The Divine Names* does not consider names for God in general but only those found in the Bible. Although the divine is ineffable in itself, as the cause of all things it has named itself "being, life, light, God, truth, ..., etc." in the scriptures.[68] While "The Symbolic Theology" is said to consider the various anthropomorphic or other perceptible descriptions of God, *The Divine Names* proposes to interpret "the bodiless names for God." [69]

> However let us for the moment proceed to an explication of the intelligible names of God, collecting, for this purpose, what scripture has to say and being guided in the manner I have already mentioned.[70]

The contents of this treatise are frequently described as "the explication of the divine names." This expression appears in the opening lines, throughout the work, at the conclusion, and in a subsequent treatise to refer back to this book.[71] In fact, throughout the works which consider the various scriptural topics, the imagery of "explicating" or "unfolding" is frequently associated with exegesis, whether of biblical hymns, the descriptions of the angels, "The Theological Representations" or the shapes of God discussed in "The Symbolic Theology" and *The Ninth Letter*.[72]

It is also in *The Divine Names* that the second Dionysian claim to biblical fidelity is most directly stated. Besides providing the subject matter for most of his treatises, the scriptures are his supreme authority for *all* speech and thought about God.

[67] CH 6 200C 13-16. Other such passages include the opening lines (CH 1 121A 6-11), the programmatic statements of the treatise's agenda (CH 2 136D 4 to 137A 1, CH 4 177C 15f.), and the beginning of the subsequent treatise, in reference back to *The Celestial Hierarchy* (EH 1 372C 39-42).

[68] DN 1 596A 13f.; further scriptural names for God are listed in DN 1 596BC, and at the beginning of each chapter in *The Divine Names*.

[69] *τὰς ἀσωμάτους θεωνυμίας* DN 9 913B 20f.; DN 1 597B 18f., and DN 9 913B 22f.

[70] DN 1 597B 19-23.

[71] *ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν θείων ὀνομάτων ἀνάπτυξιν, ὡς ἐφικτὸν, μετελεύσομαι* DN 1 585B 11f.; DN 1 597B 27, DN 2 637C 42, DN 8 889C 8; DN 13 981C 24-33; MT 3 1033B 25.

[72] Regarding "The Divine Hymns," whether lost or fictitious: CH 7 212B 22-24; angels: CH 15 328A 15, 333A 5, 336C 36; "The Theological Representations": DN 2 645A 3; "The Symbolic Theology" DN 9 913A 12f., 913A 20; *The Ninth Letter*: 1104C 26, 1109A 3, 1112B 22, 1113B 10. The term "explicate" is used only once in a non-exegetical sense: the divine light unfolds or unwraps the unenlightened in order to let in its illumination (DN 4 700D 46f.). The word is never used regarding the interpretation of liturgical symbolism.

> This is why we must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from what the sacred scriptures have divinely revealed.[73]

This strongly stated principle of the authority of the scriptures is echoed several times in the first chapter of *The Divine Names*. Although the divinity is unknowable in itself, he writes, "we are raised up to the enlightening beams of the sacred scriptures ..." by which we are illuminated and shaped.[74] "We learn of all these mysteries from the divine scriptures." [75] Perhaps the author's strongest statement of fidelity to the Bible concerns not the general subject matter of his treatises nor his thought as a whole but rather the specific argument that biblical names are applicable to the entire divinity. The specific names under discussion in *The Divine Names* refer not to any single person of the Trinity alone, except of course "father," "son," and "holy spirit," but rather to the full trinitarian godhead.[76] Continually citing the scriptures, the Areopagite seems to anticipate the accusation that he is introducing confusion into biblical distinctions.[77] He responds somewhat categorically:

> And if, in this, someone is entirely at loggerheads with scripture, he will be far removed also from what is my philosophy, and if he thinks nothing of the divine wisdom of the scriptures, how can I introduce him to a real understanding of the word of God? [78]

The issue is not yet whether this argument and those of the other treatises actually are faithful expositions of the scriptures, but rather that the author *presented* them as such.

Some evaluation is necessary regarding *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*'s claims of a biblical basis. Here, too, the announced intention is to proceed according to the scriptures.[79] Yet this formal claim is largely ignored by the rest of the treatise. Only a few details of the liturgical services are presented as scriptural, and even these concern not a liturgical practice or form but the contents of a prayer or reading.[80] The basis for the discussion

73 DN 1 588A 2-5, repeated in identical terms in DN 1 588C 31-34. See the contrast between human wisdom and the scriptures in DN 1 585B 13-16.

74 DN 1 589B 13-18; cf. DN 1 588A 8-12.

75 ταῦτα πρὸς τῶν θείων λογίων μεμυήμεθα, DN 1 589D 38; cf. DN 1 592B 20 and 592C 40.

76 DN 2 636C to 637C, and 652A, with the trinitarian names mentioned in 641D and 645D.

77 DN 2 636C 5-13, 637A 4-16, 637D 44 to 640A 2.

78 DN 2 640A 2-6.

79 EH 1 369A 10 to 372A 2.

80 As examples, see the discussions of the prayer at the center of the synaxis (EH 3 440B 26-28 and 440C 33) and of the view that the dead shall receive their deserved recompense (EH 7 560CD 41-44).

of the sacraments is rarely scripture itself but rather an assumed body of post-scriptural tradition.[81] When the author says that he has presented baptism or the synaxis according to the scriptures, the claim seems more a formality than an internally consistent principle.[82] A broader remark at the opening of the treatise may also fall into this category. "For the being of our hierarchy is laid down by the divinely-transmitted scriptures." [83] First of all, this use of the term "being" (*οὐσία*) is neither supported by the context nor clarified by other uses of the term. In fact, it seems more perfunctory than philosophical since the author has already called Jesus the "being" of every hierarchy.[84] He makes no attempt to explain either remark metaphysically or to relate them to each other. Secondly, this passage cannot be taken to assert an unqualified supremacy of the scriptures since it continues with an explicit contrast of the biblical realm with a "more immaterial" tradition, namely, the liturgy.[85] Pursuit of this contrast, however, must be deferred until the liturgical material has been introduced and the basic similarities of the two spheres have been established.

Two observations can serve to summarize this introduction to the Dionysian view of the Bible, and to suggest the questions which will receive further investigation. First, the scriptures provide the subject matter for several Pseudo-Dionysian treatises, including some which were lost or never written at all. These biblical topics are presented neither randomly nor canonically, but in a subtle arrangement which, it will be argued, includes the author's liturgical concerns. Accordingly, the treatises which concern these scriptural and liturgical subjects are also arranged in an overall pattern, as partially indicated in *The Mystical Theology*. This brief but crucial treatise makes no claims to be a biblical or liturgical exposition. It serves rather to clarify the theological method and internal structure of the corpus, as suggested by the opening prayer for guidance to the supreme pinnacle of the scriptures.[86] Discerning the overall structure of the Areopagite's corpus and the internal rationale for his sequence of treatises will be a major result of the following investigation into his method of interpreting the Bible and the liturgy.

Second, this introductory chapter has already laid some groundwork for such an investigation. The absence of a precise canon and the

[81] On the "leaders" of this tradition, see chapter 3, n. 37.
[82] EH 5 504B 23f. and EH 3 424C 7f., respectively.
[83] *οὐσία γὰρ τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶ τὰ θεοπαράδοτα λόγια*, EH 1 376B 23-25.
[84] EH 1 372A 11f.
[85] EH 1 376BC 25-34.
[86] MT 1 997A 8-10.

occasional uses of "theology" and "theologian" to mean more than the scriptures and their writers suggest that the Bible is inseparable from its interpretation. The author's main concern is not an exclusive status for the Bible, as "divinely transmitted," for example, but rather the way the divine uses it to guide the faithful. Such guidance occurs in the very process of interpretation, and we return to *The Divine Names* for a glimpse of the inner dynamics of such interpretation.

> In my opinion, it would be unreasonable and silly to look at words rather than at the power of the meanings. Anyone seeking to understand the divine things should never do this. ... We use letters, syllables, phrases, written terms and words because of the senses. But when our souls are moved by intelligent energies in the direction of the things of the intellect then our senses and all that go with them are no longer needed. ... When, as a result of the workings of perception, the mind is stirred to be moved up to contemplative acts, ...[87]

Dionysius uses this argument to refute a mechanical reading of the scriptures on one specific point, and it provides us with his clearest statement of the importance of scriptural interpretation over against the bare scriptures. Furthermore, when he speaks of the soul's movement from the perceptible "up" to the intelligible, he has introduced us to the primary motif of his biblical hermeneutics.

[87] DN 4 708C 24-28, 708D 40-45, 708D 48 to 709A 1.

3

The Liturgical Setting

Modern scholarship has given more explicit attention to the Areopagite's liturgical material than to his biblical hermeneutics, but often for a motive not immediately relevant to our concern. Stiglmayr led the attempt to mine the Dionysian description of the eucharistic liturgy for clues to the author's time and place.[1] His conclusions concerning a Syrian context in the late fifth century have been generally upheld.[2] Yet this entire approach pursues an external comparison of the Pseudo-Dionysian rites with other patristic sources. The current concern is rather the author's internal method of interpreting both the liturgical and the biblical domains, and ultimately the relationship of such interpretation to the rest of his corpus.[3]

[1] "Die Lehre von den Sakramenten und der Kirche nach Ps.-Dionysius," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 22 (1898): 246-303. "Eine syrische Liturgie als Vorlage des Pseudo-Areopagiten," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 33 (1909): 383-385.

[2] P. Schepens argued rather unsuccessfully for an Alexandrian milieu: "La liturgie de Denys, le pseudo-Aréopagite," *Ephemerides liturgicae* 63 (1949): 357-376. Stiglmayr's position was strengthened (and Schepen's refuted) by E. Boularand, "L'Eucharistie d'après le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclesiastique* 58 (1957): 193-217 and 59 (1958): 129-169. Further interest in external comparisons has confirmed the Syrian provenance of the author's liturgical features. W. Strothmann, *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe in der Schrift De ecclesiastica hierarchia des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita*, Göttinger Orientforschungen, Reihe 1, Bd. 15 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977-1978), LX; to be cited as *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe*.

[3] Pages 171-199 of Roques' *L'Univers Dionysien* concern the clerical offices and lay orders; pages 245-302 treat the various rituals. Apparently without using Roques' work, Dom Denys Rutledge published a curious combination of translation, paraphrase, and commentary: *Cosmic Theology, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys: An Introduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). Surely the Areopagite and especially his liturgical treatise need to become better known in the English-speaking world. But Rutledge isolated the author from his time and his liturgical thought from the rest of the corpus. Partly to counter this double error and partly to disseminate Roques' achievement among English readers, I.P.Sheldon-Williams offered a basic survey of the same material: "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius," *Downside Review* 82 (1964): 293-302; 83 (1965): 20-31.

The liturgical setting consists of the hierarchies, the clergy and laity, and the sacraments and other rites.

A. The Hierarchies

The spiritual interpretation of liturgical symbols is a special concern of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. While liturgical terms and ritual contexts appear throughout the corpus, the basic presentation of clerical offices, lay orders, and the various rituals is found in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. A "hierarchy," to begin with the author's most influential neologism, is "the complete arrangement of the sacred elements comprised within it." [4] The Dionysian arrangement of rites and offices is called the "ecclesiastical" hierarchy only in the title and first subtitle of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.[5] Within the body of the text, the usual designation is simply "our hierarchy," as opposed to the heavenly hierarchy and to the "legal" hierarchy of Old Testament times.[6] Apart from the treatise's title and subtitle, the term "ecclesiastical" appears only once in the entire corpus; and even there it refers not to an entire hierarchy but to a body of worshippers assembled together.[7] Here as elsewhere the terminology of the titles varies from that of the text itself and may suggest an editor's hand. The corpus offers no internal references to document more conclusively the author's own choice of a title, such as those supplied for certain other works.[8]

For Pseudo-Dionysius, "our" hierarchy is a symmetrical arrangement of three categories with three members each, a triadic structure quite reminiscent of late Neoplatonism.[9] In his concern for parallel structures

[4] EH 1 373C 35f.; cf. CH 3 165B 17f.

[5] EH 1 369 4 and 8.

[6] ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχία CH 10 273A 2, EH 1 369 10, 377A 3f., EH 6 536D 45f. On only rare occasions does the author refer to this hierarchy in other terms: "human hierarchies" (CH 9 260B 16), "the hierarchy among us" (CH 8 241C 41), "our most pious hierarchy" (CH 1 121C 29) or "the orders of the ranks here and now" (CH 1 124A 1f.). All these exceptions occur in *The Celestial Hierarchy*. The third hierarchy is "the hierarchy according to the law (ἡ κατὰ νόμον ἱεραρχία): EH 2 392C 33f., EH 3 440A 10, EH 5 501B 24, 501C 29-35, Ep. 8 1089C 35.

[7] ἁπάσης τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς διακοσμήσεως, EH 3 425B 27f. The nominal form (ἐκκλησία) refers to the assembled congregation with or without the catechumens and other lower orders: EH 2 393C 35, 396A 11, EH 3 425C 39, 445A 1. Other occurrences of the noun also suggest the assembly of the faithful: Ep. 8 1093B (an echo of 1 Timothy 3:15?), 1097C 28, Ep. 9 1112D 46 (from Hebrews 12:23), and perhaps EH 4 473D 46f.

[8] The peculiarity of this title is noticed only rarely (e.g. B. Brons, *Gott und die Seienden*, p. 65), although the use of συμπρεσβυτέρῳ in CH 1 120A 5 and EH 1 369 6) is more commonly considered editorial. The text itself supplies titles for certain works, as in MT 3 1032D to 1033B.

[9] Roques, *L'Univers*, pp. 68-76.

and good order, he presents this "triplicity of the hierarchical division" as a parallel to the angelic arrangement of three triadic groups.[10] Yet the three triads of "our" hierarchy are not three trios of beings as in the angels' hierarchy, but rather three types of initiators (the clerics), three varieties of those initiated (the laity), and three sacraments. "Now, as often said before, it is through the three holy sacraments and powers that the three ranks of holy initiators preside over the three orders of those being initiated." [11]

The author's claims for a single structure common to all three hierarchies are rather forced. The normative arrangement seems to be "our" hierarchy, since he claims that every hierarchy has sacraments, initiators, and the initiated.[12] But he must then re-interpret the heavenly hierarchy to include a "sacrament," namely, "the most immaterial conception of God and of things divine" and the condition of imitating the divine.[13] This suggestion of a celestial sacrament finds no confirmation in *The Celestial Hierarchy* itself where the first triad is composed of superior beings (seraphim, cherubim, and thrones) and not sacraments in the normal sense of rites. The attempted parallel between these two hierarchies is doubly strained since not three but one angelic "sacrament" is here advanced. The same triadic structure is imposed upon the legal hierarchy, given by God in obscure images to the spiritual "children" of Old Testament times.[14] The legal hierarchy had its initiators, exemplified by Moses, and those who were uplifted by them.[15] But this proposed parallel also fails, for there are not three sacraments, but only one, "an uplifting to worship in spirit," [16] and it has no ceremonial connotation.

More persuasive than these strained similarities of all three hierarchies is the placement of "ours" as a mean term between the other two and thus only partially similar to each.

> Now, the Word of God asserts that our hierarchy represents a more perfect initiation in that it is a fulfillment and completion of that [legal] hierarchy. It is both celestial and of the Law for it occupies a place half way between two opposites. With the one it shares the contemplations of understanding; with the other it has in common the use of varied symbolism derived from the

[10] EH 5 501D 46f., CH 6 200D 19.
[11] EH 5 516A 8-11.
[12] EH 5 501A 1-6.
[13] EH 5 501A 8f.
[14] EH 5 501B 23-30.
[15] EH 5 501C.
[16] EH 5 501C 30f.

> realm of perception, symbolism by means of which there is a sacred uplifting to the divine.[17]

This text suggests a basic component of the Pseudo-Dionysian enterprise and anticipates the overall structure of our study. The "variegation" into perceptible symbols and the "uplifting" to the divine by means of them are the respective subjects of Parts Two and Three below.

Yet "our" hierarchy's framework has one more triadic pattern to consider: the three functions or powers which are considered part of every hierarchy. "The hierarchic order lays it on some to be purified and on others to do the purifying, on some to receive illumination and on others to cause illumination, on some to be perfected and on others to bring about perfection." [18] This hierarchical trio of powers is said to mirror the divine activity. "The Divinity first purifies those minds which it reaches and then illuminates them. Following on their illumination it perfects them in a perfect conformity to God." [19] This triad of purification, illumination, and perfection became a standard framework for many medieval writers.[20] Yet we should not read back into Pseudo-Dionysius a simple sequence of moral purification, cognitive illumination, and unitive perfection. In the Areopagite, all three powers concern a spiritual cognition, although in various degrees.[21] The three activities are applicable to the celestial realm only when the notion of purification is understood in terms of knowledge and not ethics, for the lower heavenly beings are "purified" not of any moral blemish but of their relative ignorance.[22] Similarly, to be perfected means to "join the company of those who

[17] EH 5 501CD 39-46; see below, chapter seven, n. 50, for a similar arrangement in Iamblichus.

[18] CH 3 165B 28-31; each hierarchy "is divided into first, middle, and last powers," CH 10 273B 12-14.

[19] EH 5 508D 47-50; see also CH 3 165B 19 and *ἡ θεία μακαριότης ... καθαίρουσα καὶ φωτίζουσα καὶ τελεσιουργοῦσα ...*, CH 3 165C 32-39.

[20] The literature on the "three ways" in Dionysius and in his followers is surprisingly scarce. See Roques, *L'Univers*, pp. 92-101, and Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, "Die drei Wege," pp. 174-178. The basic pattern was already complete in Gregory of Nyssa, as indicated by the outline of J. Daniélou's *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique* (Paris: 1944). Andrew Louth claims that Origen adapted this trio from the Stoic and Middle Platonic pattern of "ethike," "physike," and "enoptike" (*The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1981], pp. 57-60). Yet would not "enoptike" be more appropriately paired with the way of illumination and contemplation? Perhaps because the Areopagite wished this formula to seem original with himself, he gave it considerable attention. Yet it is only auxiliary to his basic construct of "procession and return."

[21] CH 7 209CD 21-41.

[22] EH 6 537ABC.

behold sacred things with a perfected understanding."[23] The author's concern for systematic comprehensiveness leads him to apply these first, middle and final powers not only to each hierarchy, but also to each of their three major internal divisions, as well as to each individual rank and even to the individual heavenly or human mind.[24] Nevertheless, the clearest and most natural application of the three powers is to "our" hierarchy where the clerics purify, illuminate, and perfect the lay orders.

B. Clergy and Laity

In his attempt to parallel the three hierarchies, Dionysius briefly argues that every hierarchy has a group of leaders, "those, inspired by God, who understand and purvey"[25] the sacraments. This category of clerical or "hieratic" orders is applied only loosely to the heavenly or legal hierarchies.[26] As a triad of "our" hierarchy, the clerics can be called "the God-like dispensers of sacred things," the "rank of sacred ministers" and "the three ranks of holy initiators."[27] Far more precise and important are their designations as the three orders of hierarchs, priests, and deacons.[28]

The highest office in the human hierarchy is only rarely called by a name other than "hierarch."[29] Although the author claims that the term

[23] CH 3 165D 45-48; cf. EH 5 504B 18-20. The third power can be called τελεστικός whether the subject is hierarchies in general (CH 3 168A 8, CH 7 208A 7), the angelic hierarchy (CH 8 240C 37), or "our" hierarchy (EH 6 536D 40, 537B 22). It can refer to the perfecting power of the synaxis (EH 2 404D 42) and of the hierarchs (EH 5 516A 1), or to the perfecting invocations (EH 7 565C 30) when deacons are ordained (EH 5 509B 22) and monks are tonsured (EH 6 533A 5).

[24] EH 5 501D 50f.; see the example of the Seraphim, (CH 10 273B 14-20 and 273C 21-31) and Ep. 8 1093C 26f. which suggests a "hierarchy" internal to one Demophilus.

[25] ἐνθέους αὐτῶν ἐπιστήμονας καὶ μύστας EH 5 501A 5. The former term refers only to hierarchs in EH 1 373C 38 and is unspecified in EH 2 401B 24. The latter is unspecified in CH 4 181A 10 and DN 1 597A 9, but in EH 5 501C 33 designates Moses' role in the legal hierarchy. The related term ἱερομύστης refers in DN 2 640D 42 and DN 3 681D 51 to the followers of the scripture writers, and in Ep. 9 1108A 2 to the leaders of either the legal or the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

[26] EH 5 500D 4-6, 501A 12, 501C 31, EH 6 533C 36f.

[27] EH 5 501D 48f., 504B 9 and 13, 516A 9. Also called ἱερουργός is the angel who purified Isaiah (CH 13 300B 14) and the unspecified individuals (clerics?) who, with the (lay?) "lovers of visions," experience the synaxis (EH 3 436C 31f.). In general, the designation ἱεροτελεστής indicates a company more exalted than the clerical ranks in general: Jesus (EH 5 512C 28, Ep. 8 1096A 9), Moses (EH 5 512B 22), Hierotheus (DN 4 713A 2, probably CH 6 200D 19 and DN 10 937B 25), and the hierarchs by themselves (EH 5 512B 18, Ep. 8 1088D 46, and probably EH 1 377A 7, 377B 16, and EH 7 568A 14).

[28] EH 5 504B 10f., 505D 40, and 508A 2, respectively.

[29] The variations are: τελεσιουργός EH 5 505B 20, ἀρχιερεύς Ep. 8 1089C 33, καθηγεμών EH 3 445A 5, ὁ τῆς θεαρχικῆς διακαιώσεως ὑποφήτης EH 7 564A 6f., and ἱεροτελεστής (see above, n. 27).

ἱεράρχης is derived from "hierarchy,"[30] the lexicographical evidence suggests the opposite derivation. As Stiglmayr pointed out long ago, the word "hierarch" was used to mean a "cultic leader" long before Pseudo-Dionysius. The term "hierarchy," on the other hand, was unknown before him, at least in the sense of an organized structure of office-holders with clear channels of internal mediation.[31] Crucial to the hierarch's role is his "sacred mediation," for the divine is mediated to the human and the human uplifted to the divine only through the activity of the hierarch.[32] Whether in the angelic or the ecclesiastical realm, the principle of a well-ordered mediation is fundamental to our author's hierarchical universe. The two lower clerical offices and all the lay orders as well as all of their liturgical activities depend finally upon the hierarch. "The divine order of hierarchs is therefore the first of those who behold God. It is the first and also the last, for in it the whole arrangement of the human hierarchy is completed and fulfilled."[33]

In accordance with this principle of hierarchical mediation, a superior order possesses all the powers of a subordinate one, whether in the human or celestial sphere. Thus the hierarch participates preeminently in the three hierarchical activities of purification, illumination, and perfection.[34] As the highest of these, the power of perfection is often emphasized in characterizing the hierarchs because it belongs exclusively to their order. "Their rites are images of the power of the divinity, by which the hierarchs perfect the holiest of symbols and all the sacred ranks."[35] This absolute power and authority over the entire human hierarchy is tempered only by the hierarch's deference to the apostles and their first successors,[36] who are perhaps to be identified with the "leaders" who established the original ecclesiastical tradition.[37] Otherwise no authority

[30] *ὡς ἱεραρχίας ἐπώνυμος* EH 1 373C 34, and EH 2 393B 25f.

[31] "Über die Termini Hierarch und Hierarchie," by J. Stiglmayr in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 22 (1898): 180-187.

[32] *διὰ τῆς ἱερᾶς αὐτοῦ μεσιτείας*, EH 2 396A 2. Hermann Goltz used this expression in his title, *Hiera mesiteia. Zur Theorie der hierarchischen Sozietät im Corpus areopagitum* (Halle, 1972). The principle of mediation is only implied in the author's own definition of "hierarch" in EH 1 373C 36-39: "an inspired and holy man who understands all sacred knowledge and in whom his entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known." See EH 1 372D 46 to 373A 6, and EH 5 504CD.

[33] EH 5 505A 8-12.

[34] EH 5 508C 31-41.

[35] EH 5 505B 19-22; cf. EH 5 505D 35f., 508C 29, 513C 39f., 513D 43, 516A 1, EH 6 536D 41.

[36] Ep. 8 1093C 28-30.

[37] These authoritative leaders (often called divine or inspired) forged the post-scriptural tradition of liturgical names and practices which the hierarchs administer (EH 1

above a hierarch is ever mentioned, nor is the relationship between hierarchs ever discussed.[38] The author's interest is confined to the internal dynamics of one local hierarchy under one sovereign hierarch.[39] In summary, the office of the hierarch serves as a channel for his hierarchy's every facet, whether liturgical or disciplinary, as the following discussion of the priests and deacons will confirm.

In the correlation of the three clerical offices with the three activities of perfecting, illuminating, and purifying, the second ordained rank, that of the priests, is the illuminating order, although here too the lower activity of purifying is also encompassed.[40] The various descriptions of a priest's activities present two apparent discrepancies. First, the only ceremony where the priest is the principal officiant seems to be the monastic tonsure, a rite of "perfection" presumably above the priest's powers.[41] Behind the symmetrical façade proposed by our author stood his specific community; perhaps its actual practices could be neither entirely forced into his stylized framework nor described too precisely without jeopardizing the pseudonym.

Second, one summary description of the priest's activities seems to give them a greater role than they have in the rest of the corpus.

376C 31, 376D 37, EH 4 472D 8, 476C 35, 485A 8, EH 6 532D 46, EH 7 561C 38, 568B 19, DN 1 592B 18, DN 7 873A 4). No one is explicitly named, except Hierotheus, "our illustrious leader" (DN 3 681A 2; cf. CH 6 201A 7, EH 2 393A 17, EH 3 424C 6, DN 2 648A 11, 649D 39, DN 3 681C 38, DN 7 865B 10).

[38] The exception is the statement that disputes should be settled among those of the same rank (Ep. 8 1093C 30f.); cf. Roques, *L'Univers*, p. 179.

[39] The term "hierarch" is sometimes applied outside its natural context. Melchizedek and Zechariah are called hierarchs (CH 9 261A 5f. and 12, CH 4 181B 15f.), the latter perhaps because of his direct contact with the celestial Gabriel without a human mediator, a possibility reserved for hierarchs. The superior angelic beings mediate "like hierarchs" (CH 8 241A 11, CH 13 304B 19) in their relationships to inferior beings. Similarly the Seraph who purified Isaiah by means of a lower angel is called a hierarch (CH 13 305D 47f., 308A 6) just as hierarchs can be called angels (CH 12 292B to 293B). Moses is of course the first of the hierarchs in the legal hierarchy (EH 5 501C 33). The apostles, Hierotheus, and others are also termed hierarchs (DN 3 681C 42, 681D 48). While the adjective "hierarchical" usually means "pertaining to the hierarchy," it can also mean "pertaining to the hierarch," as in EH 5 513C 32 and perhaps EH 2 401C 35f. Thus the author's words to Timothy in CH 9 261B 14f. and EH 1 377AB could imply that they are both presented as hierarchs.

[40] EH 5 505D 40, 508C 34-36, EH 6 536D 41. During his ordination the priest bends both knees in order to symbolize the two powers (EH 5 516AB).

[41] EH 6 533AB. Conversely, the hierarch seems always to preside throughout the purifying and illuminating baptismal ceremony where his abundance of powers, including perfection, would seem superfluous except for the final "perfecting chrism of the myron" (EH 2 404C 33f.; cf. EH 2 396D 48-50) and the use of the myron on the water (EH 2 396C 41f.).

> The light-bearing order of priests guides the initiates to the divine visions of the sacraments. It does so by the authority of the inspired hierarchs in fellowship with whom it exercises the functions of its own ministry. It makes known the works of God by way of the sacred symbols and it prepares the postulants to contemplate and participate in the holy sacraments.[42]

Yet in every ceremony except the tonsure, the priests have no independent role and are always described as assisting the presiding hierarch. In baptism they enroll and announce the candidate and sponsor, present the oil and finish the anointing begun by the hierarch, lead the candidate to the font, and return him afterwards to the sponsor.[43] In the synaxis the priests are practically invisible, although they do help set up the elements, and join the hierarch in washing their hands and congregating around the altar.[44] The synaxis is presented as entirely the prerogative of the hierarch. Yet according to the summary quoted above, the priestly order "makes known the works of God by way of the sacred symbols," a reference to the central moment of the synaxis.[45] Might this suggest that a priest could preside alone? The author's own concluding argument that the priest's authority is derivative and entirely dependent upon the hierarch does in fact leave open this possibility:

> Even if the priests can preside over some of the revered symbols, a priest could not perform the sacred divine birth without the divine ointment, nor could he perform the mystery of holy communion without having first placed the symbols of that communion upon the alter. Furthermore, he would not even be a priest if the hierarch had not called him to this at his consecration.[46]

Thus, while *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* presents baptism and the synaxis as "episcopal" services, namely the domain of the hierarch, it also acknowledges that priests could officiate without the immediate presence of a hierarch.

[42] EH 5 505D 40 to 508A 1.

[43] EH 1 369 8f. and EH 2 400D 47, EH 2 396C 35-41, 396C 27f., 396C 37-45.

[44] EH 3 425C 35f., 425D 44-46.

[45] Regarding "the divine works," see EH 3 440C 29, 441C 34, and the fuller discussion of θεουργία, chapter two, nn. 12f.; regarding the "most sacred symbols," cf. EH 6 536C 25, EH 7 565B 27, and chapter four, nn. 16f.

[46] EH 5 505BC 22-29. The text goes on to say that the consecration of the myron and of the altar, and ordination upon which depend baptism, the synaxis, and the priesthood itself are all the hierarch's exclusive domain (EH 5 505C 30-34). The anointing which concludes baptism is not explicitly identified as reserved for the hierarch, but the myron used in the anointment is otherwise so reserved.

The order of deacons or "assistants" is the purifying and discerning order.[47] The deacons symbolically purify those who approach baptism by assisting in their ceremonial disrobing and renunciation.[48] In the synaxis and other services the deacons read the scriptures, which are especially intended for the lowest lay order, namely those yet being purified.[49] They then discern and separate those not eligible to remain, announcing their dismissal and standing guard at the doors.[50] At this point in the synaxis, certain "chosen" deacons, with the priests, set the bread and the cup on the altar and then stand around the presiding hierarch.[51] In all of these functions the deacon is purely the assistant or even the agent of the hierarch. In fact Dionysius once says that the hierarch disrobes the candidate for baptism "by means of the deacons." [52] The relationship between the hierarch and his assisting priests and deacons is most clearly stated in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter thirteen, where the author needs to explain why a seraph seems to have bypassed the intermediate ranks of celestial beings in purifying Isaiah. Once again applying a normative liturgical pattern in a different context, Dionysius proposes the "appropriate paradigm" of the hierarch and his agents or extensions. Just as "our hierarch, when he purifies or illuminates by means of his deacons or priests, is himself said to purify or illuminate," so also it truly was a seraph who purified Isaiah, but who did so by means of another, intermediary angel not named in the text.[53]

To summarize the clerical orders:

> The order of hierarchs has the task of consecration and perfection, the illuminative order of the priests brings light, and the task of the deacons is to purify and to discern the imperfect.[54]

[47] *λειτουργός* EH 5 508A 2, cf. 508B 16f.; *καθαρτικὴ καὶ διακριτική* 508C 30f.; cf. EH 5 516B 12. To symbolize the single power of purification, the deacon bends only one knee during his ordination (EH 5 509B 18f.).

[48] EH 5 508A 7-15; EH 2 396A 12f.

[49] EH 5 508B 18-20; EH 3 425C 27f., EH 6 532A 3f., EH 7 556C 33-35.

[50] EH 3 425BC 27-31, 436A 2-5 and EH 7 556C 37f.

[51] EH 3 425C 32-38, 425D 46, EH 5 508B 22-27. The deacons' functions are summarized in EH 5 508AB 2-27.

[52] EH 2 396B 13.

[53] CH 13 305CD 39-50; see chapter five, n. 36 below.

[54] EH 5 508C 28-31. In another summary statement, the clerical group as a whole "purifies the uninitiated, light-leads the purified, and perfects ..." (EH 5 504B 9-15). R. Roques (*L'Univers*, p. 185, n. 3) notes that *ἐπίσκοπος*, *πρεσβύτερος*, and *διάκονος*, i.e., the usual patristic terms, are never used for these three clerical ranks, except for the perhaps editorial use of "presbyter" in CH 1 120A 6f., EH 1 369 6f., DN 1 585A 6f.

The trio of subordinate lay orders is also presented in accordance with the three powers:

> With regard to the initiates, their first power is that of being purified. Their middle power is, after purification, the illumination which makes it possible for them to contemplate certain sacred things. Finally they have the power, more divine than the others, of being enlightened in the perfect understanding of the sacred illuminations which they have been permitted to contemplate.[55]

The laity spans a spectrum from those not yet baptized to the exalted echelon of monks, and thus has few common features and fewer encompassing terms. The title and opening lines of the chapter devoted to this assortment speak of "the initiated orders,"[56] an expression applicable to the catechumens only in the sense of "becoming initiated." The chapter devoted to these orders reverses the descending sequence of the previous chapter's discussion of the clerics, and considers the lay triad in an ascending order. In this way the presentation of the third and highest rank, the monks, leads smoothly into the chapter's liturgical concern, the monastic vows and tonsure ceremony.

The lowest level in the entire hierarchy is the order or orders still being purified.[57] They are first defined in terms of the liturgy: "those numbers who are dismissed from the sacred acts and rites of consecration," namely after the scripture readings.[58] While the subdivisions of those dismissed are not always clearly delineated, one terse description presents them as yet another triad, "the catechumens, the possessed, and the penitents." [59] The catechumens are the lowest rung of the hierarchy, being completely uninitiated and "in incubation" for their baptismal birth.[60] Because of the

[55] EH 5 504B 15-20.

[56] *τῶν τελουμένων τάξεων* EH 6 529C 2, 529D 5, 536A 2; cf. EH 5 504B 16. This term (from *τελέω*) can refer to the legal hierarchy (EH 5 501C 37), to all hierarchies (see EH 5 501A 5f.), and even to "the *things* performed" (EH 7 552D 4f., EH 2 397C 27, and chapter seven's title in EH 7 552D 2). As a group, the lay people are called the "subordinate orders" (EH 5 500D 7f.) and "those who are proportionately led to sacred things" (EH 5 501D 49f.).

[57] EH 6 536D 42f., cf. EH 6 529D 7 and EH 7 557C 27f.

[58] EH 6 532A 1f. This may be a loose reference to the synaxis and the sacrament of the myron. The latter is often called a "sacrament-working" (EH 4 476C 33, 477B 21, 485A 11, EH 5 500D 4). On these terms, see below, nn. 101-106. The laity is also defined in terms of the liturgy in the author's summary of the entire hierarchy: they are "unpartaking of the sacred vision and communion," EH 6 536D 42f. On the role of the scriptures which are read to this order by the purifying deacons, see EH 6 532A and chapter eight below.

[59] EH 3 425C 30f., 432C 28f.

[60] EH 3 432D 39, 433B 22. They are identified as *κατηχούμενοι* only in the descriptions and interpretations of the synaxis (EH 3 425C 30, 432C 28, 432D 39, 433B 19 and 22) and of the funeral service (EH 7 556C 38, 557C 29).

role of the scriptures in this process, the biblical lessons in the liturgy are described as "incubating" or "hatching."[61] The catechumens are even dismissed from the funeral service while the other two orders of those being purified, namely the possessed and the penitent, are allowed to remain, since they have at least been initiated, despite their various subsequent weaknesses.[62] The possessed are ranked slightly higher than the catechumens, since they are already baptized, but they have weakened before an opposing power.[63] They have suffered an "unmasculine" weakness which can be strengthened by the scripture readings.[64] Regarding the third category of those being purified, the expression "those in repentance" is a formal designation used only three times.[65] They have "fallen away" or abandoned the sacred life, but are being restored by "the returning teaching of the good scriptures."[66] Under various names, these three groups (the catechumens, the possessed, and the penitents) constitute the order being purified in order to join or re-join the middle order of the faithful.[67]

The author gives comparatively little attention to the "sacred people." "The intermediate order is made up of those who enter upon the contemplation of certain sacred things and who, because they have been well purified, commune therein."[68] Two features are emphasized. First, in this middle rank which is already purified, contemplation and

[61] *τοῖς μαιευτικοῖς λογίοις* EH 6 532A 3f.; cf. EH 4 476D 46, 477A 1. The "incubation" of the catechumens is also mentioned in EH 3 433B 18-20, and EH 7 557C.

[62] EH 7 557C to 560A 5.

[63] EH 3 433B 21. They are identified as *ἐνεργούμενοι* only occasionally: EH 3 425C 30, 432C 29, 433B 21, 433D 44, 436B 16, EH 4 477A 2 and 4; see the same term in *The Apostolic Constitutions* 8.7.2. The reference to an opposing power is a word play on *ἐνέργεια* and *ἐνεργούμενος* as in EH 3 433D 44.

[64] *ἀνάνδρως* EH 3 436B 23, EH 4 477A 4, EH 6 532A 8. Regarding the readings, see EH 4 477A 11 and EH 6 532A 9f. The so-called "exorcism" (Gandillac, *Œuvres Complètes*, p. 272) in EH 3 436A is not of a demon from the possessed, but of the possessed from the sanctuary, i.e., the dismissal. Perhaps two variants of demonic possession are involved in EH 4 477A 2-4.

[65] *οἱ ἐν μετανοίᾳ ὄντες*: EH 3 425C 31, 432C 29 and 436A 8f. These are the only occurrences of the term for "repentance," but see Ep. 8 1088B 21 for a verbal form.

[66] *οἱ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἀποστάται ζωῆς* EH 3 436B 21f.; EH 6 532A 6f., cf. EH 3 436A 7. In EH 3 433D 45 and EH 6 532A 6 "apostate" seems to apply to the possessed. Yet neither the penitents nor the possessed are linked with "apostasy" when it is mentioned in EH 2 397D 41, 400A 4, 400B 20, and EH 3 440C 39.

[67] In three separate passages two further categories, variously stated, seem added to this order (EH 3 436B 26-30, EH 6 532A 10-13, EH 4 477A 10-13). Perhaps this group is not a simple triad, but includes still more stages of rehabilitation under church discipline.

[68] EH 6 532B 20f.; cf. EH 6 536D 44. *ὁ ἱερὸς λάος* EH 7 556C 30, EH 6 532C 32, 536D 44, 536C 28, Ep. 8 1089A 9.

communion are correlated with the middle power of illumination, since this is the order "given over to the priests for illumination." [69] This group is judged worthy of the vision and communion of the sacraments from which the lower orders are separated.[70] Second, since this group observes each sacramental ritual in its entirety and is indeed "the contemplative order," it would seem that the "Contemplation" sections of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the spiritual interpretations of liturgical symbols, are intended primarily for this order. Yet its contemplation is always described as limited or even partial. This rank contemplates and communes "proportionately," "in its own way," "as far as possible." [71] While such statements of proportion and limitation depending upon rank apply throughout the hierarchy,[72] a clear distinction is here drawn between the lay people on the one hand, contemplative and communing of *certain* sacred things, whose ignorance is patiently born by the priests,[73] and those, on the other hand, who contemplate every entire sacred act "in an intellectual contemplation and communion," ... "not like the middle order ... but in another way with a divine knowledge beyond the sacred people," [74] namely, the monks.

"Of all the initiates the most exalted order is the sacred rank of the monks." [75] The name μοναχός indicates their "oneness" not in the sense of a solitary life, but rather an "undivided and unitary life which makes them one by the sacred joining together of divisions into a 'monad' which is like God ... ." [76] The name "therapeutae" or "servants" derives from their pure ministry and service of God and of the good.[77] As introduced above, the superiority of the monks over the other lay people consists of their broader and deeper understanding of the liturgy. The monks' order is "introduced to the holy operations of the sacred sacraments it has beheld and is proportionately uplifted by their sacred understanding to a most

[69] EH 6 532B 21-28.

[70] EH 6 532C 33f.; cf. EH 3 425C 32, 436B 18, EH 4 477A 15, EH 5 508A 6, 508B 25, EH 6 536D 42, EH 7 557C 39.

[71] EH 6 532B 21, 532C 31; 532B 27; 532C 34.

[72] EH 6 536C 35-38.

[73] EH 6 532B 20, cf. EH 5 504B 17f.; Ep. 8 1096A 8.

[74] EH 6 532D 39-41 and 536C 25-29. See also "he must surpass the median way of life," EH 6 533B 22, and "the switch from the sacred life of the middle order to one of greater perfection," EH 6 536B 12f.

[75] EH 6 532C 35f.; cf. 533D 42.

[76] EH 6 533A 2-5. The name "monk" appears only in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.

[77] EH 6 533A 1f., Ep. 8 1093C 37-39. This term appears in Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa* where it was interpreted by Eusebius [*Ecclesiastical History* 2.17.3 (PG 20: 176)] to indicate Christian ascetics. Otherwise it is rare in early Christian literature.

complete perfection." [78] In fact, the celebration of the synaxis immediately after tonsure is intended to remind everyone that the new monk receives communion with a divine knowledge superior to that of the order he just left behind.[79] The exalted status of the monks is in no way inconsistent, however, with their obligation to honor the clerical orders as their superiors. In particular, they are "entrusted to the perfecting powers of the hierarchs." [80] The entire eighth letter of the corpus addresses the principle of order within the hierarchy. The monk who violated this principle, one "Demophilus," is severely chastised: "it is not permitted that a priest should be corrected by the deacons, who are your superiors, nor by the monks." [81]

C. Sacraments and Other Rites

In summarizing the arrangement of ordained and lay orders, our author now includes his main interest, liturgical rites.

> The holy sacraments bring about purification, illumination and perfection. The deacons form the order which purifies. The priests constitute the order which gives illumination. And the hierarchs, living in conformity with God, make up the order which perfects. As for those who are being purified, they do not partake of the sacred vision or communion. The sacred people is the contemplative order. The order of those made perfect is that of the monks who live a single-minded life.[82]

Yet this kind of capsule survey can be misleading. Taken as a whole, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* does not present a systematic framework quite as rigid and compartmentalized as certain of its summary statements might suggest. For example, the passage just cited implies a triad of sacraments corresponding to the three powers of purification, illumination, and perfection. Indeed the term τελετή is often used to specify one of "the three holy sacraments": [83] "the sacrament of the divine birth" (baptism),[84]

[78] EH 6 532D 43-46; cf. "being uplifted to the divine understanding of sacred things" (EH 6 533C 36f.).

[79] EH 6 533B 28f., 536BC 20-28.

[80] EH 6 532D 40f.

[81] Ep. 8 1088C 30-32.

[82] EH 6 536D 38-44. Regarding variations from the over-simplified scheme of this text, see R. Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, pp. 171-199.

[83] EH 5 516A 9, quoted in its full context above, n. 11.

[84] EH 2 397A 8. The term θεογενεσία is peculiar to Pseudo-Dionysius in early Christian literature but is his standard name for baptism (EH 2 392B 30, 404C 35, EH 3 425A 9, 432C 26, EH 4 484C 29, etc.). The patristic term φώτισμα is used in the two subtitles (EH 2 392A 1,

the "sacrament of sacraments" (the synaxis or eucharist),[85] and "the sacrament of myron."[86] But the situation is actually quite complex. First of all, there are other rituals described in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and seemingly given equal status with the three sacraments just mentioned. Second, these three do not fit the triad of purification, illumination, and perfection in a simple correlation of one sacrament to one power.

On the former question of rituals in general over against sacraments in particular, when the corpus refers to "other sacraments" (other, that is, than the synaxis or the ointment-myron),[87] does it mean only two other sacraments, or are there more? Very frequently the sacraments are neither identified nor numbered.[88] Despite this apparent ambiguity, no ritual other than baptism, the eucharist, and the consecration of the myron is ever termed a τελετή. The term is never used to mean the ordinations of the deacons, priests, or hierarchs, or the religious profession of the monks, or the funeral rites, or any other ritual. Although religious ceremonies in general, including the sacraments, are called by a flexible variety of names, this strict and consistent use of the word "sacrament" preserves the triadic structure of the author's system.[89]

393A 1) but its only appearance in the text is an etymology, perhaps of what the author knew to be the traditional name (EH 3 425A 12). The standard name βαπτίσμα appears only twice, once for the immersion itself (EH 7 565A 6, cf. EH 2 404B 22) and once for the whole rite (EH 2 404A 11).

[85] EH 3 424C 6. This rite can be called the "eucharist" (EH 2 396D 50, 404D 41, EH 3 424D 22, EH 6 536C 32) or "communion" (EH 3 424C 14, 425A 3, EH 4 472D 7, EH 5 505B 26), although these terms are also used in the more general senses of thanksgiving (EH 2 393C 29 and 33, EH 3 436C 39) and participation in the sacred (EH 2 404D 39-43, EH 3 425A 1). The name "synaxis," on the other hand, is never used in the common sense of "gathering" (see the word play in EH 3 429A 13f.), but is reserved as the proper name for this sacrament (EH 3 424B 2 and 425B 20 as titles; EH 3 428C 30f., 429A 9, EH 4 472D 4, 473A 2, 476C 36, 477B 20). See R. Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, pp. 256-260.

[86] The word "myron" can be translated as "ointment"; EH 4 472D 8, 473A 1, 485A 9, EH 5 504C 24.

[87] Other than the synaxis: EH 3 424C 12f., 424D 22, 425A 2 and 4; other than the myron: EH 4 473A 12.

[88] CH 8 240C 31, EH 3 429D 44, 432A 1, 432C 25, 433B 24, 436B 20, 436C 35, EH 4 484C 38, EH 5 501A 4, 501D 47, 505D 41 and 46, EH 6 532C 34, 532D 44, EH 7 557C 30, and "the sacraments of the mysteries" in Ep. 8 1097B 24, and Ep. 9 1108A 1. The singular form in CH 3 164D 11 and EH 1 372A 2 is not identified and is perhaps not meant as a specific sacrament among the others.

[89] As noted above, the parallels constructed among the three hierarchies also led the author to name a "sacrament" both the heavenly hierarchy's conception of God (EH 5 501A 8f.) and also the legal hierarchy's elevation to a spiritual service (EH 5 501C). These extraordinary uses of the term do not affect the consistency displayed when only "our" hierarchy is under discussion. Even R. Roques seems to disregard this consistency, leading to a misleading latitude for the term "sacrament" (*L'Univers*, p. 246 and 294). A

Yet the structure of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* as a treatise presents these other rituals with titles and a format parallel to those of the three sacraments. After the introduction, we find chapters on the mystery of illumination, the mystery of the synaxis, the mystery of the sacrament of myron, the mystery of the (three) clerical perfections or ordinations, the mystery of the monastic perfection or religious profession, and the "mystery regarding those who died sacredly." [90] The salient term here is "mystery" and it carries a variety of meanings in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. The "mysteries" can be the ineffable conceptions or doctrines of the divine, particularly the mystery of the incarnation.[91] The term is also used to mean the actual eucharistic elements partaken in the synaxis: "For the participation [by the hierarch] precedes the imparting [to the others] and the reception of the mysteries precedes the mysterious distribution." [92] The plural form can be used in a broader sense to mean "sacred ceremonies," whether in direct juxtaposition with the word "sacrament" or by itself.[93] The singular form is never used in the body of the text to name a specific ritual.[94] Such a usage, which suggests an identical status for at least six rites, is confined to the subtitles; it is neither present in nor supported by the rest of the text. Thus the triadic arrangement of three sacraments is not seriously vitiated by this use of the term "mystery," whether it is editorial, as one might suspect from surveying similar idiosyncrasies in other titles and subtitles,[95] or the author's own attempt at a literary symmetry.

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thorough consideration of this term and of many similar borrowings from the religious or mysteriological side of Neoplatonism is provided by Piero Scazzoso, "La terminologia misterica nel Corpus Pseudo-Areopagiticum, Provenienza indiretta e diretta dei termini misterici nel corpus," *Aevum* 37 (1963): 406-429.

[90] EH 2 393A 1, EH 3 425B 20, EH 4 473A 1, EH 5 509A 8, EH 6 533A 11, EH 7 556B 25.

[91] MT 1 997A 12, Ep. 9 1104B 16, and perhaps CH 4 180B 25 and CH 6 200C 10; the incarnation: CH 4 181B 13 and 21, DN 2 640C 34; Ep. 3 1069B 19.

[92] *ἡ τῶν μυστηρίων μετάληψις* EH 3 445A 1-3. A similar expression, and meaning, appears in EH 7 553C 29 and EH 6 536C 33. On this basis several other occurrences of the term could also be interpreted as signifying the eucharistic elements: EH 2 404D 42, EH 3 424D 25, 425A 6, EH 5 505B 26, and perhaps EH 6 533C 29, DN 4 724B 29, and Ep. 9 1108A 6. Cf. the liturgy of St. James, p. 234.22 (ed. B. Cl. Mercier in *Patrologia Orientalis* 26 [1946]).

[93] In conjunction with "sacrament": Ep. 8 1097B 24 and Ep. 9 1108A 1; by itself: EH 1 372A 3, EH 3 429C 27, EH 5 505B 17, and perhaps CH 3 165B 21.

[94] A use of the singular to mean a specific feature of a rite is found in EH 5 512B 17. Otherwise the singular is used only in reference to the incarnation (note 91).

[95] The peculiar vocabulary in the title, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (369 A), is mentioned above in note 8. The terms "presbyter" and "co-presbyter" in the subtitles at CH 1 120A 6f., EH 1 369 6f., and DN 1 585A 6f., do not appear elsewhere in the corpus as clerical titles (see above, note 54). The ceremony of religious profession or tonsure is

The other, nonsacramental ceremonies are given a flexible variety of names. The clerical ordinations are called "perfections,"[96] a name which depends upon the wider concept of perfection in the corpus. The divine perfection is the cause of all derived perfection, whether of the angels or of another hierarchy.[97] More specifically, hierarchical perfection is the culmination of a spiritual process, the highest of the three powers: "purification, illumination, and perfection."[98] Thus the clerics, already purified and illuminated as lay people, attain a spiritual culmination in the ceremony called "perfection," by which Pseudo-Dionysius means their ordination by a hierarch. "Common to the clerical perfections of the hierarchs, priests, and deacons" in their ordinations are certain ritual gestures, etc.[99] Although perfection is certainly essential to the monastic life, and the monks are indeed the "perfected" lay order,[100] the ceremony of religious profession or tonsure is never called a "perfection" in the text itself, nor does it receive any other formal name. The terminological

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called a "perfection" only in one chapter's subtitle (EH 6 533A 11), as discussed shortly. Baptism is called "illumination" only in chapter subtitles EH 2 392A 1 and 393A 1 (see above, note 84). The adverb πρεπόντως in the chapter title at CH 2 136C 2 is a hapax legomenon. The title of *The Eighth Letter* contains a term (ἰδιοπραγίας, 1084A 3) which does not appear in the body of the letter or anywhere else in the corpus except DN 8 896D 45. The juxtaposition of "mystical" and "theology" appears only in the title of that treatise (MT 998 4, but see "the mystical theologians" in CH 2 144C 34); the former term is discussed in chapter four below, note 8, the latter, in chapter two above, notes 25-39. The plural form "kataphatic and apophatic theologies" is found only in the title of chapter three of *The Mystical Theology* (1032C 2).

[96] τελείωσις: EH 5 509A 7; cf. EH 5 500D 7, EH 6 529D 4, and the titles in EH 5 500C 3 and 509A 8. This rite is called ἀφιέρωσις in EH 6 536C 30, a term which means "sanctification" in general in EH 4 484D 44 and EH 5 516C 27.

[97] EH 1 373B 25, DN 1 596D 42, DN 7 868C 29; angels: CH 6 200C 11, CH 7 205B 13, CH 8 240C 30, EH 5 501A 12; as the culmination of the earthly life, death is also called "the blessed perfection in Christ" (EH 7 556D 42; cf. EH 3 437B 19, 437C 32, EH 7 557B 23 and 26, 560A 5, 560C 28).

[98] CH 3 165C 37, CH 7 209C 34, CH 8 240D 41, CH 10 273C 29, EH 5 504B 9 and 15, EH 6 536D 39. As a culmination: CH 3 165B 23, EH 1 369 12, 376A 8. It is in this context of the three powers that the anointing of the myron adds the element of perfection to the purifying and illuminating rite of baptism (EH 2 404C 35, EH 4 484C 37) and the synaxis provides the power of perfection to other rituals. The synaxis serves as the conclusion and climax (EH 3 424D 20) of, for example, baptism (EH 2 396D 48-50, 404D 40-43), the ordinations (EH 6 536C 28-37), and the tonsure rite (EH 6 533B 28f., 536B 20-28).

[99] EH 5 509C 31; cf. EH 5 505A 7, 512B 26, 513B 12, 513C 27. The term is also used individually for the ordinations of deacons (EH 5 509D 39), priests (EH 5 505C 29, but see ἁγιαστείαν in 505C 30f.) and hierarchs (EH 5 509A 9). In this sense it is also applied to Moses' "ordination" of Aaron (EH 5 512BC 23f. and 26) and Jesus' "ordination" of the disciples (EH 5 512C 32f.). It also retains its original meaning of "completion" regarding the selection of Matthias to complete the number of the disciples at twelve (EH 5 512D 43).

[100] EH 6 536D 43f., 532D 46, 533A 5 and 536C 27.

bridge from this rite as a monastic "perfection" to those rites called clerical "perfections" consists of the subtitle alone (EH 6 533A 11) and thus, like the parallelism of the "mysteries," is not decisive. In any case, neither rite is ever called a sacrament.

Other terms used for these rituals are actually generic categories rather than proper names. For example, a "sacred-act" (ἱερουργία) is usually liturgical, whether indicating the sacramental ceremonies as a whole or, more commonly, a specific action within a rite.[101] The sacrament of myron is also called the "perfection" of the myron, a "perfection-working," and, most frequently, a "sacrament-working."[102] Like "perfection," the term "perfection-working" must be seen in the larger context of Pseudo-Dionysian completion or perfection in general, especially the familiar triad of powers.[103] Liturgically, the hierarch "works perfection"[104] by leading other orders to their perfections and by officiating at the two sacraments which accomplish perfection, namely the synaxis and the myron.[105] Mentioned in passing but never discussed is a consecration of the altar by the myron, called a "perfection" and a "sacrament-working."[106] Amid this large variety of names and rituals, however, the term "sacrament" is carefully reserved for only baptism, the synaxis, and the consecration of the myron.

The second complication regarding this triad of sacraments concerns its relationship to the triad of powers. Although as a whole the "sacred

[101] Rites as a whole: EH 1 376C 32, EH 5 500D 5, 501D 47, 504A 4, 504B 22, EH 6 532D 44. Specifically regarding the synaxis, EH 3 425B 19; the myron, EH 4 473B 16, 476B 12 and 485A 9. Specific actions include the kiss of peace: EH 3 437A 4 and 14, EH 5 513B 22; the anointing during baptism: EH 2 401C 38; the second and exclusive half of the synaxis: EH 3 432C 32, 436A 8, 436B 20, 440A 13. Whether in this last case the term signals a "consecration" of the eucharistic elements is pursued below, chapter five, n. 65. Non-liturgical uses of this term ἱερουργία are few: CH 7 205B 11, CH 13 300C 24, and perhaps EH 1 376A 5, EH 2 392A 7 and 392B 20.

[102] τελείωσις, EH 5 505C 31. In EH 4 477C 29 this term refers more specifically to the moment of the prayer over the myron, cf. EH 3 437A 11. τελεσιουργία: EH 2 404C 37, EH 4 472D 8, 476B 17 (Göttingen text). τελετουργία: EH 4 476C 33, 477B 21, 485A 11, EH 5 500D 4. The context is not always ritual; see the references to Isaiah's purification in CH 13 305B 19, 305D 46 and 50.

[103] In general: EH 3 432B 21, EH 5 512C 36, DN 4 697C 34, DN 13 977C 19, Ep. 9 1109A 6, 1112B 21. The divine powers: CH 3 165C 35, EH 5 508D 50; angelic powers: CH 7 209C 29f., CH 8 240B 22, CH 10 272D 17, DN 4 696B 20; hierarchical powers in general: CH 3 165B 30, 168A 7.

[104] EH 5 508C 32; cf. 505B 20, 505C 33 and 36, 508C 20.

[105] EH 5 513A 10f., 513B 17, 513D 43. Synaxis: EH 3 425A 1 and 4; myron: see note 102. The presence of the myron also makes other rites "perfection-workings" (EH 4 473A 13, 484A 12), such as the chrism which concludes baptism (EH 4 484B 16).

[106] EH 4 484C 36-39; EH 5 505C 32.

action of the sacraments" does involve the three powers of purification, illumination, and perfection,[107] the correlation is not simply one sacrament to one power.

> Something has already been said about the triple power connected with the holy work of the sacraments. From scripture it has been shown that the sacred divine birth is a purification and an illuminating enlightenment, that the sacraments of the synaxis and of the myron-ointment provide a perfecting knowledge and understanding of the divine works.[108]

Thus baptism includes the first two powers while the eucharist and myron rites are identified with the third power. Yet even this more complicated arrangement, which avoids a simple one-to-one correlation of sacraments to powers, is too simple. On the one hand, just as the superior power of perfection recapitulates the first two in itself,[109] so the synaxis and sacrament of myron contain all three powers in themselves. On the other hand, while baptism is concerned primarily with purification and illumination it also concludes with the perfecting chrism of the myron.[110] Thus all three powers are present in all three sacraments, although with different emphases.[111] Our concern, however, is not immediately the specific interpretations of the sacraments proposed by Pseudo-Dionysius, but rather his interpretive method. The focus of this study will be on the Dionysian process of understanding the sacraments (and the scriptures), not simply on his conclusions.

To each sacrament is devoted a chapter, each with a standard internal structure of three parts: an introduction to the ritual, a terse description of its various features in their sequence, and finally a more discursive section, entitled "Contemplation," which interprets the symbols of the rite. The use of the term "contemplation" to mean the interpretation of liturgical rites parallels Antiochene exegetical theory where *θεωρία* meant the spiritual interpretation of the scriptures.[112] The Pseudo-Areopagite

[107] EH 5 504A 4-9.

[108] EH 5 504BC 20-25.

[109] EH 5 504A 7f., 508C 38-40.

[110] EH 2 404C 33-36, EH 4 484C 28-31.

[111] "All things in all things, but in each appropriately." (*πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν, οἰκείως δὲ ἐν ἑκάστῳ*) Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* 103, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 92.

[112] To give only the most obvious example and one likely known to the Pseudo-Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* has the same tripartite structure as each of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*'s interpretative chapters: an introduction (PG 44: 297B – 304C), a sequential narrative (304C – 325C), and a fuller interpretive section entitled *θεωρία* (328A – 429D). "Contemplation" itself (not just as a subtitle) is considered in chapter seven, nn. 92-106; see especially n. 106 regarding the chapters' tripartite structure.

presents each liturgical ritual as a sequence of symbols in similar need of spiritual interpretation. For example, "let us behold the divine symbols of baptism."[113]

Looking further at the chapter on baptism, we find another pattern applicable to all three sacraments, a pattern of fundamental importance in understanding the author's method of interpreting ritual. Sacramental symbols first present a widely understood and rather superficial level of meaning. This first level is introductory to the main concern, a fuller and more spiritual interpretation shared with the more exclusive group. The rite of baptism, for example, presents two levels of interpretation, two perceptions of the same event. On the superficial level, called an "introductory leading of the soul," baptism teaches the uninitiated the simple lesson that a physical cleansing by means of water suggests a moral purification.[114] But the author's main concern is a more elaborate understanding of the sacraments, and since baptism is the first to be treated, he provides at this point an introduction to his interpretative method.

> But we, who have reverently lifted our eyes up to the sources of these rites and have been sacredly initiated in them, we shall recognize the stamps of which these things are impressions and the invisible things of which they are images. I have already clearly shown in my book – *The Intelligible and the Perceptible* – that the sacred symbols are actually the perceptible tokens of the intelligible things. They show the way to them and lead to them.[115]

This quotation brings us to the Pseudo-Dionysian method of interpreting symbols, specifically those of the liturgy. It therefore concludes this introductory chapter on the liturgical setting of the Areopagite's thought and requires only two final observations.

First, the distinction between a superficial and a more advanced level of interpretation regarding baptism also applies to the synaxis and the myron. The "Contemplation" section of the chapter on the synaxis presents these two degrees of understanding in terms of the bipartite structure of the ritual. First, the readings of the scriptures instruct the lower orders and guide them toward purification. Not yet able to appreciate more than the exterior of the symbols, they are dismissed before the actual supper, just as Judas left the upper room.[116] The process

[113] EH 2 392B 30f.; regarding the synaxis and myron, cf. EH 3 424C 6-10 and EH 4 472D 9-12, respectively.

[114] EH 2 397AB 7-22; εἰσαγωγικὴ ψυχαγωγία EH 2 397C 23f., cf. EH 3 428A 11.

[115] EH 2 397C 27-33.

[116] EH 3 428AB 11-26.

of a more spiritual interpretation is portrayed as a movement from the images to the god-like truth of the archetypes,[117] a movement which associates the sequence of the rite with both an architectural symbolism and also a metaphysical meaning:

> But let us leave behind as adequate for those uninitiated regarding contemplation these signs which, as I have said, are splendidly depicted on the entrances to the inner sanctuary. We, however, when we think of the sacred synaxis must move in from effects to causes and in the light which Jesus will give us, we will be able to glimpse the contemplation of the intelligible things clearly reflecting a blessed original beauty.[118]

The sacrament of the myron has a similar bipartite service. Its "Contemplation" begins with an "introductory uplifting," namely, that the concealing of the myron from general view symbolizes that "divine men cover in secret the fragrance of that sanctity within their minds." [119] Attention then moves from this external impression to the sacrament's "more divine beauty," namely the loftier interpretation.[120] As in the case of the synaxis, the entire ritual and not just the most exclusive portion is given a spiritual interpretation. This level of contemplation is withheld from the lower orders, those who do not fully understand even that "common" part of the rite in which they are permitted to share.[121]

Second, the suggestion of a movement in the interpretation of liturgical symbols from sense perception to the intelligence recalls the similar movement in biblical interpretation mentioned above, at the end of chapter two. Thus these two introductory chapters on biblical hermeneutics and liturgical interpretation have led to the same point, the Areopagite's view that the interpretation of symbols is a movement or process in which the perceptible is not only the starting point but the very guide and path to the intelligible.

[117] EH 3 428A 8-10.

[118] EH 3 428C 27-33. This quotation and the general subject of the scripture readings in the liturgy are discussed more fully in chapter eight below.

[119] EH 4 473B 16-20.

[120] EH 4 476B 12f.

[121] EH 1 376C 32f.

Part Two
The Downward Procession

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4

The Single Method of Biblical and Liturgical Interpretation

Amid the many technical terms and inter-locking triads in the Areopagite's biblical and liturgical universe, a single motif emerges as crucial to both types of symbolism and indeed to the entire corpus. The interpretation of scriptural and ritual symbols is depicted as a movement "up" from the realm of sense perception to that of the intelligence. Although introduced separately above, biblical and liturgical symbols will now be considered together, beginning with a more detailed examination of three specific texts.

A. The Bible and the Liturgy Juxtaposed

As mentioned above, *The Ninth Letter* of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus is devoted to a particular problem of biblical interpretation. Ostensibly summarizing the lost or fictitious work, "The Symbolic Theology," [1] this epistle concerns the use of anthropomorphic, bestial, and material categories to describe the transcendent God.

> Now I thought it necessary to explicate to him and to others the great variety of sacred symbols used by scripture to reveal God. For if one looks at them from the outside they seem filled with an incredible and contrived fantasy! [2]

There follows an extensive sampling of the Bible's most crudely physical descriptions of God.[3] Nevertheless, continues Dionysius, "if one is able to see the beauty hidden internally, one will find them all mysterious,

[1] Ep. 9 1104B 8f., 1113BC 21-30.
[2] Ep. 9 1104C 25-29.
[3] Ep. 9 1104C 29 to 1105C 33.

appropriate to God, and filled up with great scriptural light."[4] Thus the lengthy exemplary material is nicely framed by the contrast between being externally filled with fantasy or absurdity and internally filled with beauty, namely, the "truth of the symbols."[5] The letter continues with a passage worthy of more thorough discussion.

> Theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand, the open and more evident on the other. The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation. The other is philosophic and employs the method of demonstration. (Further, the inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated). The one uses persuasion and imposes the truthfulness of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be taught, it puts souls firmly in the presence of God. This is why the sacred initiators of our tradition, together with those of the tradition of the law, resorted freely to symbolism appropriate to God, regarding the sacraments of the most holy mysteries. Indeed we see the blessed angels using riddles to introduce the divine mysteries. Jesus himself speaks of God by means of parables, and passes on to us the mystery of His divine activity by using the symbolism of a table.[6]

This passage carefully interweaves many of the author's key terms regarding biblical and liturgical symbols. One side of the double scriptural or theological tradition is characterized as more evident, imposing the truth of what is verbally expressed. This arena of demonstrative knowledge, of verbal persuasion, is further described as "philosophic" and "employing the method of demonstration." While both terms are extremely rare in the Dionysian corpus, the allusion may be to an Aristotelian "demonstrative syllogism," that is, to a logical proof.[7] This aspect of the biblical material persuades and confirms the truth in a straightforward, didactic function which teaches and argues on the level of human reason. Scriptural passages of this type are verbally explicit, persuading and demonstrating by means of what is plainly said.

This spoken part of the tradition is interwoven with another, ineffable side of the scriptures. Skillfully elaborating this contrast with his careful construction and rich vocabulary, the author first characterizes the double tradition with four pairs of adjectives. The open and more evident is sharply distinguished from what cannot or should not be spoken and is

[4] Ep. 9 1105C 33-36.

[5] Ep. 9 1105D 45; *ἐκτός, ἀναπέπλησται* 1104C 28; *ἐντός, ἀναπεπλησμένα* 1105C 34 and 36.

[6] Ep. 9 1105D 45 to 1108A 7.

[7] *ὁ ἀποδεικτικὸς συλλογισμός* in Aristotle's *Analytica Posteriora* 74B 10; in Pseudo-Dionysius *ἀποδεικτικός* and *φιλόσοφος* (as an adjective) are both hapax legomena.

therefore mysterious and secretive, or "mystical." The Pseudo-Dionysian writings use the term "mystical" to refer to a mysterious, spiritual concealment in general rather than an immediate and personal experience of God in the more technical sense of later "mysticism." [8] The remaining pairs of adjectives heighten this contrast even further, for the philosophical and demonstrative is distinguished from the symbolic and the initiating. The characterization of this side of the scriptural tradition as "symbolic" reminds the reader of the letter's overall purpose in interpreting biblical symbols. Thus it is the symbolic part of the scriptures which is externally full of absurdity but internally full of light, and which accordingly rewards the proper interpretation by those privileged to receive its meaning. While the clear and demonstrative side of the scriptures persuades and confirms on the verbal level, the symbolic material actually performs or acts by means of a "mystery that cannot be taught" or "untaught mystagogies." In Pseudo-Dionysius, a "mystagogy" is both a liturgical initiation into the mysteries and also a secret revelation in general.[9] The verbal forms show it to be a divine activity whereby the thearchy or an intermediary leads one into the full spiritual meaning of, for example, baptism's triple immersion.[10]

The doubleness of the scriptural tradition does not refer to two "senses" of the same passage but rather to two types of scriptural texts.[11] The one is explicit and didactic, and receives little attention in the entire Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. The other type of passage is symbolic and contains within itself a duality of external absurdity and internal meaning. This type of biblical material receives our author's sustained attention. Overall, this dense and rich passage on the dual biblical tradition emphasizes an exclusive, spiritual dimension to scriptural symbolism. The interpretation of the Bible is not a philosophical demonstration by an uninvolved exegete but rather a religious undertaking of the highest order.

Immediately following the clearest expression of this emphasis, namely the phrase "untaught mystagogies," the text introduces another sphere of

[8] This has been persuasively argued by Vanneste, as pointed out above, chapter one, nn. 13-16. See "La théologie mystique," pp. 406f., and *Le Mystère de Dieu*, p. 47. The context of the term can be liturgical (as in EH 7 565C 31 where, as here in Ep. 9 1105D 47-49, it is paired with τελεστικός) or supra-rational (MT 1 1001A 5).

[9] EH 1 372A 2 and MT 1 1000A 9. On "mystery," see chapter three above, notes 90-94.

[10] EH 2 404BC 22-28. This activity can be done by the thearchy (CH 6 200C 13), an angelic intermediary (CH 4 181B 16 and CH 13 305A 13), or the intermediary of the divine teaching, EH 2 404B 23. The author says that he himself is not worthy of doing it alone (EH 3 440C 32). Except for the text cited above (Ep. 9 1105D 52f.), the term "mystagogy" is never associated with biblical interpretation.

[11] A more elaborate enumeration of biblical categories appears in Ep. 9 1108B 23-29.

sacred symbols, the one usually associated with the term "mystagogy." "This is why the sacred initiators of our tradition resorted freely to symbolism appropriate to God, regarding the sacraments of the most holy mysteries." [12] With this unmistakably sacramental language,[13] the passage has proposed a complementarity between biblical hermeneutics and liturgical interpretation. Not that they are merely juxtaposed as vaguely related topics. Rather, the inter-locking terminology found in this passage reflects their essential and integral unity, for each noun of the sentence regarding sacramental symbols carefully echoes the previous statement of symbolism in the scriptures. "Tradition," for example, is applied to both realms. By itself, the term usually refers to a liturgical tradition, but with appropriate qualifications it can also indicate the scriptural material, as it does here: the double tradition of the theologians or scripture writers.[14] Its second appearance in this passage ("of our tradition") has a Greek construction and context which recall the author's normal way of referring to "our" hierarchy or to the legal hierarchy. The choice of "tradition" where "hierarchy" would be the usual expression emphasizes the continuity between the scriptural tradition and "our" hierarchical tradition of the sacraments. Similarly the terminological continuity is clear between the "sacred initiators" (*οἱ ἱερομύσται*) and "mysteries" in this liturgical reference and the previous "mystagogies" and "mysterious" traditions; both realms are part of an exclusive religious enterprise.

The central element in this intricate linkage of the theologians' tradition of untaught mystagogies and the sacred initiators' tradition of sacramental mysteries is their common use of symbols. The theologians' scriptural tradition is called symbolic; the leaders of the sacramental tradition are said to use god-fitting symbols. The frequent occurrences of *σύμβολον* and its cognates throughout the corpus could easily be translated as "symbols" and its derivatives. Yet the author's actual understanding of symbolism, whether designated by this term or by others, such as "image," is extremely complicated and will be addressed throughout this study.[15]

[12] Ep. 9 1105D 53 to 1108A 3. Proclus paralleled literary and ritual symbols in *In Rempublicam* 1: 78.18 to 79.4 (ed. W. Kroll [Leipzig, 1899]); see n. 58 below.

[13] Cf. Ep. 8 1097B 24 and chapter three, note 92.

[14] Ep. 9 1105D 46f.; the usual liturgical context: CH 8 240C 37, EH 1 372A 3, EH 2 397B 18f., EH 2 401A 8f., EH 4 484A 7f., EH 6 532D 43, EH 7 557C 36, 561C 38. For the passages where the term "tradition" indicates the scriptures, see chapter two, note 15.

[15] The single distinction made by Pseudo-Dionysius between *σύμβολον* and *εἰκών* is that only the former can refer to the eucharistic elements (see the next note). Proclus once remarked that the Pythagoreans began their instruction with similitudes and images (*ὅμοια, εἰκόνες*), then proceeded to the *σύμβολα* of the same subjects, and finally approached

Elsewhere in the corpus the word "symbol" indicates liturgical symbols more frequently than biblical ones, partly because the eucharistic elements are often called "the symbols." [16] *The Ninth Letter*, however, uses the term frequently regarding biblical passages, except for this single reference to liturgical symbols.[17]

The passage concludes with the authoritative examples of the angels and of Jesus himself regarding this symbolic aspect of both the biblical and liturgical traditions. The angels themselves presented the divine things "mysteriously" by means of the symbolic. Just as the choice of this adverb blends the example of the angels into the terminological texture of the larger passage, so too the vocabulary of the terse Christological example confirms the previous discussion.[18] In this context, "the theurgical mysteries" or the "mystery of God's work" again refers to ritual, as specified by the reference to the table of the last supper. Given the author's transformation of the term "theurgy" and its derivatives, the "theurgical" mysteries do not stand in an Iamblichean opposition to Jesus' "theologizing," but rather in a thoroughly Pseudo-Dionysian harmony of the divine words and divine works in employing symbolism, whether in parables or by means of a symbolic meal.[19]

The concluding reference to Jesus as the authoritative example for biblical as well as sacramental symbols confirms the complementarity of these two spheres. Certain terminological patterns discussed above in chapter two suggested that Pseudo-Dionysius did not isolate the scriptures as absolutely unique. Here, in fact, the liturgical tradition has been given a status equal to scriptural parables; it too comes directly from Jesus, the creator of the eucharistic symbols.[20] The most helpful question at this

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their direct discussion. (*In Tim.* 1.20.31ff. Diehl text; John Dillon, "Image, Symbol and Analogy: Three Basic Concepts of Neoplatonic Allegorical Exegesis," in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. Baine Harris [Norfolk, Virginia: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1968], pp. 247-262.) There is no trace of any sequence of this type in the Pseudo-Areopagite, even though his scholiast interpolated one: *ἀπὸ τῶν τύπων ἐπὶ εἰκόνα καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης ἐπὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν* (PG 4: 137D).

[16] Liturgical: EH 1 376C 34, EH 2 392B 31, 397A 7, 400D 45, 401A 9, 404B 13, etc. Biblical: CH 13 304C 26, CH 15 332C 32, 333C 27. Eucharistic elements: EH 3 437C 34; 437D 40, 440B 22, EH 5 505C 27f., EH 7 565A 7, 565D 42f., 568C 40, Ep. 8 1092C 30.

[17] Ep. 9 1104B 7 and 18, 1105C 42 and 45, 1108C 33 and 39, 1108D 50, 1109B 23, 1113B 15.

[18] Examples of such angelic mediation: CH 4 180B 20 and 181B 15. In this example of Jesus, both of the parallel participles, *θεολογοῦντα* and *παραδιδόντα*, reflect the specific terminology already used: the theologians' tradition and "our" (liturgical) tradition.

[19] On the term "theurgy" in Iamblichus and Pseudo-Dionysius, see above, chapter two, notes 11-13.

[20] EH 3 428B 21f.

point concerns not a unique status, but rather function: How and why, according to the Pseudo-Areopagite, are biblical and liturgical symbols employed?

B. Parallel Passages of Interpretive Method

To pursue the complementarity of scriptural and liturgical symbols along functional lines, we turn to an examination of two passages which suggest a common methodology.

> I think I have now explained what I mean by hierarchy itself and I must, accordingly, lift up a song of praise to the angelic hierarchy. With eyes that look beyond the world I must behold the sacred forms attributed to it by the scriptures, so that we may be uplifted by way of these mysterious representations to their divine simplicity.[21]
>
> After we have examined in detail the sacred imagery its [the sacrament of myron] parts present, we shall thus be uplifted in hierarchic contemplations through its parts to the One.[22]

The former passage turns the reader's attention from *The Celestial Hierarchy*'s first three chapters on the general concept of "hierarchy," whether angelic or human, to a specific examination of the heavenly realm as described in the scriptures. It also introduces an expression dear to this Dionysius, and a major theme in our study: "uplift," from *ἀνάγω*. The many members of this word family are frequent and crucial in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. Ostensibly writing before the biblical exegesis of Origen and before the understanding of theurgy in the Chaldean Oracles and in Iamblichus, Dionysius carefully avoids their technical uses of this terminology.[23] He usually employs it in the general and seemingly casual sense of "leading upwards." Always in careful command of his vocabulary, he occasionally allows a technical use of the term "uplifting"

[21] *Τῆς τοίνυν ἱεραρχίας αὐτῆς ὅ τι ποτέ ἐστιν, ὡς οἶμαι, καλῶς ἡμῖν ὁρισθείσης, τὴν ἀγγελικὴν ἱεραρχίαν ἑξῆς ὑμνητέον καὶ τὰς ἱερὰς αὐτῆς ἐν τοῖς λογίοις μορφοποιίας ὑπερκοσμίοις ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐποπτευτέον, ὅπως ἀναχθῶμεν ἐπὶ τὴν θεοειδεστάτην αὐτῶν ἁπλότητα διὰ τῶν μυστικῶν ἀναπλάσεων* .... CH 4 177BC 3-8.

[22] *Τὰ μέρη τοίνυν αὐτῆς ἐν τάξει κατὰ τὰς ἱερὰς εἰκόνας ἐπισκοπήσαντες, οὕτω πρὸς τὸ ἓν αὐτῆς διὰ τῶν μερῶν ἱεραρχικαῖς θεωρίαις ἀναχθησόμεθα* EH 4 472D 9-12.

[23] Samuel Laeuchli, "Die Frage nach der Objektivität der Exegese des Origines," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 10 (1954): 175-197. Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, Chapter Three "Theurgical Elevation" (pp. 177-226) and Excursus Eight, "On the Designation of the Theurgical Sacrament of Immortality as Elevation (*ἀναγωγή*)" (pp. 487-489). Except for the unfortunate omission of the Chaldean Oracles, Wolfgang A. Bienert's survey of the term is quite helpful: *"Allegoria" und "Anagoge" bei Didymus dem Blinden von Alexandria* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), pp. 58-68.

to mean a child's upbringing or general religious education, thus hinting at a relationship between "anagogy" and spiritual pedagogy.[24] A fuller discussion of this term, including the more technical uses, finds its proper context in chapter seven below. For the current purposes of introduction, we only note that an English translation is well served by the term "uplift" in that its literal meaning, grammatical flexibility, and spiritual denotation all reflect the original Greek.[25]

In the former passage Dionysius has proposed both an interpretative method, "behold the sacred forms attributed to it by the scriptures" and also the intended result, "so that we may be uplifted by way of the mysterious representations to their divine simplicity." The methodological advice here proposed seems quite simple: consider the scriptural depictions of the angels, especially their physical shapes and forms. But the attention given these descriptions is certainly not that of an objective, uninvolved exegete. The method is that of a spiritual contemplation. To "behold" is to view the highest mysteries most reverently, indeed with "supramundane vision."[26] Yet this most spiritual and contemplative activity neither ignores nor denigrates the physical features which are attributed to the angelic beings. It honors them as "sacred" precisely in their plurality and materiality, not for themselves but as the starting points for the uplifting process of spiritual interpretation.

Of course, the focus does not long remain on the descriptions themselves, since the goal of their consideration, of this hermeneutical method, is "that we may be uplifted." The beholder's spiritual movement "upward" is not an active ascent but rather a passive elevation. The

[24] EH 7 568B 17 and 27, 568C 34, 37, and 44.

[25] While one could perhaps transliterate ἀναγωγικός as "anagogical," its meaning is better captured with the adjective "uplifting." The noun form ἀναγωγή will usually be translated as (an) "uplifting."

[26] This term ἐποπτεύω has a background in non-Christian religions of antiquity. Believers "beheld" or "gazed upon" the very highest and most exclusive mysteries of Eleusian or Corybantic rites (Hippolytus, *haer.* 5.8, p. 96.11, PL 16: 3150C; Clement of Alexandria, *prot.* 2, p. 15.1, PG 8: 80B). Long before Pseudo-Dionysius, Clement had already appropriated the term for the sacred viewing of the Christian mysteries or sacraments (*prot.* 1, p. 10.19, PG 8: 68A). The expression ὑπερκοσμίοις ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐποπτευτέον is echoed in CH 8 237B 6 and, regarding liturgical "beholding," in EH 3 441D 44 and EH 4 484D 46. Except for the biblical concern of CH 1 121A 10f., further references to ἐποπτεύω as a lofty spiritual perception are either explicitly liturgical (EH 1 372B 26, EH 2 392B 30f., EH 3 424C 11, 436C 32f., 445C 33, EH 4 473C 44f., 477B 23, EH 5 504D 44f., 509A 7, 516B 24, EH 6 532D 43, EH 7 557A 4, 557C 32), or else unspecified (CH 3 165D 47, 168A 9, CH 7 209D 39, DN 1 588A 13, 597B 26). As in the two passages under discussion in this chapter, the term is associated with an "upward" movement in CH 1 121A 10f., EH 1 372B 26, and DN 1 588A 13.

contemplator of these sacred formations will not thereby climb upward but will *be* uplifted by another force. This uplifting takes place by means of the formations; the movement is not away from the images as undesirable but precisely through them as the means to a higher realm. The scriptural symbols are not disparaged but are rather valued in their temporary but indispensable role in the uplifting process. Yet the movement here described is not just vaguely or metaphorically "up"; it is "to their divine simplicity." The Areopagite often contrasts the metaphysical simplicity of the celestial sphere with the spatial plurality of the lower realm. In this passage the movement is from the perceptible plurality of physical formations and representations to the bodiless simplicity of the angels as "noetic" beings. Here again we meet the suggestion of an interpretive movement from the perceptible to the intelligible. But before pursuing this motif in other passages of biblical interpretation, we return to the chosen example of liturgical "hermeneutics."

Consistent with the general structure of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* already introduced, the fourth chapter's narration and "contemplation" of the sacrament of myron are preceded by a brief introduction. It concludes with the sentence cited above: "After we have examined in detail the sacred imagery its parts present, we shall thus be uplifted in hierarchical contemplations through its parts to the One." [27] The passage as a whole is actually a methodological outline of that chapter's remaining two subdivisions. The author proposes first to look over the sequence of the rite's individual components in their role as "sacred images." A brief sequential overview of the ritual does indeed follow in the terse narrative of the chapter's second section.[28] Similarly, the goal of being uplifted in "hierarchical contemplations" is pursued in the chapter's third and major subdivision, entitled "Contemplation." [29]

[27] EH 4 472D 9-12. Several terms in this text must be understood in their non-technical sense. Although τάξις usually means an "order" or category of individuals in the Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchical system, the expression ἐν τάξει ("in detail") with reference to the various parts of a ritual carries the less specific meaning of a sequence or succession in the rite itself (see EH 4 428A 8f. for a similar reference regarding the synaxis). The Pseudo-Areopagite's use of εἰκών preceded the vast attention given that term during the iconoclastic controversy and conveys an earlier, less technical notion of "image" or "representation." Similarly, the passage's use of ἐπισκοπέω is not in the technical sense of episcopal supervision but has the more literal meaning of observation and consideration.

[28] EH 4 473A.

[29] EH 4 473B to 483B. The chapter on the synaxis (EH 3) opens with the same agenda: to set out the rite and then be uplifted (EH 3 424C). On the tripartite structure of this and other chapters in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, see chapter three, n. 112, and chapter seven, n. 106.

The opening clause of this text, "after we have examined in detail the sacred imagery its parts present," provides several parallels to the first half of the passage discussed above, "I must behold the sacred forms attributed to it by the scriptures." In both cases the author is concerned for the plurality and symbolism presented in an authoritative tradition, the angels' representations in the scriptures and the ritual imagery of the sacrament of myron.

After looking over the sequence of sacramental images, continues the second half of the passage, "we shall thus be uplifted." Here, too, the human subject is clearly passive and not active.[30] The uplifting takes place "in hierarchical contemplations," that is, in the kind of spiritual perception and interpretation attained in the "Contemplation" section of the chapter, and it occurs "though its parts," namely the components of the rite. In both passages the plurality of the spatio-temporal realm is the very means by which one goes beyond space and time, and is thus affirmed for its importance in this process. The upward movement is not in spite of, or away from, but rather by means of the angels' sacred formations in the scriptures and the sacred images in the sacrament of the myron. Here too the intended motion is not simply "upward" but more specifically through the sequential plurality of the ritual's various parts to its oneness or simplicity.

In summary, these two passages provide some introductory parallels in both context and content. Regarding their contexts, both passages are preceded by methodological introductions, whether *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapters one through three, or *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, chapter one. They are both followed by specific applications of these methodological principles: the subsequent chapters of *The Celestial Hierarchy* concern biblical depictions of the heavenly beings, concluding with the detailed descriptions of their presumed physical forms in chapter fifteen; the remainder of chapter four of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* provides a description and then an interpretation of the sacrament of myron.

More importantly, the contents of these two passages present parallel methods and goals in the author's approach to the biblical and liturgical material. In both cases he proposes a reverential observance of the traditional and authoritative material precisely in its spatio-temporal symbolism and plurality, whether the spatial representations of the angels in the scriptures or the sequential images of the sacrament of myron. In

[30] The middle voice ("we uplift ourselves") is also grammatically impossible in this form, the future passive (see chapter seven below, n. 24).

both cases, the goal is to be uplifted through and beyond these perceptible phenomena to the superior, intelligible realm of simplicity or oneness.

The two texts express this common methodology without employing an identical vocabulary. Four times the texts provided parallels yet without terminological repetition.[31] This variety in the expression of similar or identical material would indicate that the two texts were not self-consciously constructed as formal parallels. The author's verbal versatility may instead point to an underlying methodological framework which naturally received expression in a rich variety of related terms. There is one exception: the main verb in both passages, and the key to their single method of interpretation, is "uplift."

C. "Procession and Return" in Pseudo-Dionysius

According to the texts just discussed, Dionysius presented scriptural and liturgical symbolism as intimately related both to each other and to an "uplifting" or "anagogical" process of interpretation. Although the similarities of biblical hermeneutics and sacramental interpretation in Pseudo-Dionysius have not gone unnoticed,[32] no study has ever fully pursued their single methodology and the conceptual structure which lies behind it. The entire Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, and especially its understanding of symbols, is pervaded by the motif of "procession and return," *πρόοδος* and *ἐπιστροφή*.

The full presentation of this concept requires a fundamental shift of perspective. The preceding discussion first assumed the existence of the scriptures and the liturgy as starting points and then mentioned the Areopagite's "uplifting" interpretation of them. In such a perspective, that of human inquiry, the first and only movement is "upward." But a prior question can indicate the author's own more comprehensive viewpoint: where did the Bible and the liturgy come from in the first place? In this larger view, the prior movement is "downward," a direction which does not assume but rather results in the existence of the scriptural and liturgical realm. The full picture, therefore, involves both directions. Pseudo-Dionysian biblical hermeneutics and liturgical interpretation, their

[31] Namely, "behold" and "examine," "the sacred forms" and "the sacred imagery its parts present," "by way of these mysterious representations" and "through its parts," and finally, "to their divine simplicity" and "to the One."

[32] "Nicht allein in der Terminologie, auch in ihrer ganzen Struktur sind sich die allegorische Auslegung der Schrift und die "mystische' Deutung der kultischen Riten sehr ähnlich." Völker, *Kontemplation*, p. 117, cf. pp. 106, 108, 115, and also Roques, *L'Univers*, pp. 225-234.

relationship to each other, and their role in the overall corpus, all receive fullest exposition if presented in terms of both "procession" and "return." The "upward" motif which has dominated these introductory chapters does not stand alone, nor should it even be presented first. In the total perspective of our author, the "procession" is logically prior to the "return," and the true starting point is not human inquiry but the divine self-manifestation.

The Dionysian notion of "procession and return" clearly comes from Neoplatonism. Systematized by Iamblichus, the full concept is most accessible in Proclus: "every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it." [33] E. R. Dodds has described it as

> a trinity-in-trinity, the three moments of the Neoplatonic world-process, immanence in the cause, procession from the cause, and reversion to the cause – or identity, difference, and the overcoming of difference by identity. This triad is one of the governing principles of Proclus' dialectic." [34]

Often summarized by its second and third terms, the pattern of remaining, procession and return is now generally acknowledged as essential to the structure of late Neoplatonism. One recent study flatly concludes that the "total structure" of Proclus' *The Elements of Theology* is that of remaining, procession and return.[35] Stephen Gersh, for example, has organized a lengthy study of several Neoplatonists around this dynamic, which he calls the "downward and upward processes," even though they are neither spatial nor even temporal movements.[36] Gersh examines both the "objective" (metaphysical) and the "subjective" (cognitive) dimensions of procession and return in both pagan and Christian thinkers. He concludes that while both types of Neoplatonism saw both dimensions in this theme, the Christians, including Pseudo-Dionysius, shifted the emphasis from

[33] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* 35, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 39. See also "elements" 25-39. To be cited as *Elements*.

[34] E. R. Dodds, *Elements*, p. 220; cf. xix-xx, 212-223. See also W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos, Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1965), pp. 162f.

[35] James M. P. Lowry, *The Logical Principles of Proclus' ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980), p. 75.

[36] *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978). For further bibliography on the theme of "procession and return," see his p. 46, n. 93. Gersh sums up the Areopagite's use of this theme: "As the Christian inheritor of the theory, Ps-Dionysius shows a tendency to replace the stereotyped terminology with a wide range of equivalents, although the thought behind the words seems not to differ substantially from the doctrine of [late Neoplatonism]" (p. 46). This study will be cited as *From Iamblichus*. See also Gersh's earlier study: *Κινήσις ἀκινήτος. A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 50f.

objective ontology to subjective epistemology.[37] This general observation can be documented in great detail in Pseudo-Dionysius. Although Gersh unfortunately never pursued his theme in the Areopagite's scriptural exposition or sacramental theory, the framework of "procession and return" is precisely the over-arching structure in which Dionysius presents his thoughts on the Bible and the liturgy. For Pseudo-Dionysius the deity "descends" into the spatial and temporal realm of sense perception in the scriptures and the liturgy in order to lift those who behold these perceptible symbols up to, and beyond, their intelligible meanings.

To introduce this specific argument, we need to note first the Areopagite's general adaptation of the Neoplatonic language of procession and return. As in Proclus and others, the Dionysian concept of "procession" often appears in a close relationship with the first of the three moments, namely "remaining" or *μονή*: "Proceeding outward to everything, it [the deity] yet remains in itself." [38] The Pseudo-Areopagite used this notion to express several Christian themes, including the doctrines of the trinity and of creation. In his discussion of divine unity and trinity, he gives the transcendent and unknowable unity of God several names, including *μονή*.[39] The trinitarian distinctions, correspondingly, are often called "the processions and revelations of God." [40] In this trinitarian context, "remaining" and "procession" refer ontologically to their respective ineffability and manifestation. This same terminology is used regarding the doctrine of creation, as in the phrase "the being-making procession." [41] The thearchy "proceeds to all things, gives of itself appropriately to them all, and overflows in a surplus of peaceful fecundity, and yet because it is transcendently one it remains in its own complete and utter unity.[42]

[37] Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 286.

[38] Ep. 9 1109B 26f.; see also CH 1 121B 19, DN 2 649B 19-25, DN 9 916BC, Ep. 9 1105A 9, and 1109D 44.

[39] DN 2 641A 11. The author seems almost reluctant to use *μονή* for the divine unity, adding "if it is necessary to speak this way" (*εἰ οὕτω χρὴ φάναι*).

[40] DN 2 640D 44-46; cf. 641D 48 to 644A 1, 649B 11f.

[41] *οὐσιοποιὸν ... πρόοδον* DN 5 816B 8f. and 825A 6.

[42] DN 11 952A 13-17; cf. DN 4 712C 41-43. This idea of overflowing, that the cause of all made all things through an excess of goodness (DN 4 708A 14f.; cf. CH 4 177C 11-13, DN 4 697C 28-30), and that all things, therefore, including matter, participate in some way in the divine (CH 2 141C 31-34, 144B 25-28, DN 1 593D 41-51, 596BC 26-32) has been variously interpreted. Some scholars contrast this view with a willed creation by a transcendent God, while others deny that a pantheistic emanation was intended, or is even entailed. For the most recent statement of the terms and participants in this debate, which is not essential to the current study, see Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, pp. 20-22.

One full and systematic statement of the "processions of the thearchy" includes not only the doctrines of the trinity and creation but also the incarnation. The scriptures, writes Pseudo-Dionysius, praise the divine as a "monad and henad," as a trinity or triad, as the cause of beings, as wise and beautiful in ordering the harmony of creation, and as "loving toward humanity" in actually entering the spatio-temporal realm of the creation in Jesus.[43] The movement of this passage is a divine procession from simplicity to trinity, then to creation and its governance, and finally to entering fully the created realm of spatial and temporal plurality. The passage is more than theology in the abstract; it is "theology" in the Pseudo-Dionysian sense, namely the scriptural word of God.[44] As suggested above by the procession from the ineffable oneness of God to the trinitarian manifestations, this process is also revelatory; it is the way that angelic and human beings come to know the divine.[45] In fact the descending procession described in this passage *is* affirmative theology, the apparent subject of the treatise entitled "The Theological [i.e. scriptural] Representations." [46]

The second half of this motif, i.e., the "return," also finds both metaphysical and epistemological expressions in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. In ontological terms, the thearchy returns the world's divided plurality to a whole oneness, toward that which truly is.[47] Yet this "reversion" is also epistemological since it is a return "from numerous false notions ... to the single, true, pure, and coherent knowledge." [48] Accordingly, negative theology is an ascending or returning sequence of negations, a counterpart to the descending procession of affirmations. "When it involves a denial we begin from the lowest category," namely, any perceptible characteristics ascribed to the deity,[49] "then as we climb higher, we say that it is neither a soul, nor a mind, ..." nor anything

[43] DN 1 589D 38 to 592B 17. The incarnation is also presented as a "procession" in EH 3 444A 14, 444C 38, and DN 2 644C 30-34. This condensation of the scriptural message as a descending procession can be contrasted with the biblical summary of a "horizontal" process in EH 3 440C to 441B, although both conclude with the incarnation. The latter transforms the salvation history narrative of the "eucharistic prayer" into a journey of the soul or of human nature.

[44] The passage emphasizes its source in the scriptures, the scripture writers, and every scriptural "enterprise" (DN 1 589D 38-43).

[45] Cf. "the enlightenment granted according to the divine procession" in CH 7 209C 24f., and CH 15 340A 4-6.

[46] MT 3 1032D to 1033A 11.

[47] DN 11 948D 9f.; cf. DN 4 701B 20.

[48] DN 4 701B 21-24.

[49] MT 3 1033C 38 and *The Mystical Theology*, chapter four.

intelligible in human terms.[50] While full exposition of these themes must await subsequent chapters, the author himself can summarize how not only the divine realm itself but also its self-manifestation to human comprehension and theological method are portrayed in terms of "procession and return."

> When we made assertions we began with the first things, moved down through intermediate terms until we reached the last things. But when we deny all things, we climb from the last things up to the most primary things ... .[51]

The Areopagite saw this same pattern in the scriptures and the liturgy. The Bible offers not only explicit discussions of the divine procession, as mentioned above, but also symbolic expressions of this "downward and upward" motion, such as the revolution of chariot wheels.[52] Liturgical activities also present several symbols for the divine procession and return. The synaxis, for example, begins with the hierarch's censing procession into the sanctuary and his return to the altar where he began, just as the divinity proceeds to all things but is not moved.[53] This interpretation of the censing procession expands to include the entire ceremony of the synaxis as a symbol of procession and return.

> Similarly, the divine sacrament of the synaxis remains what it is, unique, simple and indivisible and yet, out of love for humanity, it is pluralized in a sacred variegation of symbols. It extends itself so as to include all the hierarchical imagery. Then it draws all these varied symbols together into a unity, returns to its own inherent oneness and confers unity on all those sacredly uplifted to it.[54]

The passage closes by interpreting the overall activities of the hierarch in the same way, since "he makes the divine return to the primary things the

[50] MT 5 1045D 4f., and *The Mystical Theology*, chapter five.

[51] MT 2 1025B 14-18. Certain passage also suggest, although cryptically, that "abiding, procession, and return" are reflected in the circular, straight and spiral types of the deity's and the soul's motion. For example, "the straight motion of God [means] the unswerving procession of His activities ..." (DN 9 916C 37-39, cf. DN 4 704D to 705B). These three motions have in turn been associated with mystical, symbolical, and discursive theology, respectively (most recently Ch.-A. Bernard, "Les formes de la théologie chez Denys l'Aréopagite," *Gregorianum* 59/1 [1978]: 39-69). While this last association is not entirely persuasive, clearly the metaphysical framework of procession and return is here reflected in some measure in the Areopagite's theological method.

[52] CH 15 340A 1-6, see also the symbolism of the Seraphim's wings in CH 13 304D to 305A and EH 4 481B.

[53] EH 3 425B 21-25, 428D 41 to 429A 2, EH 4 476D 38-45.

[54] EH 3 429A 8-15.

goal of his procession toward secondary things."[55] The fraction of the bread and the distribution of the one cup are also considered symbolic of the deity's benevolent procession into incarnate plurality and of the unifying communion there accomplished.[56]

Yet these are merely examples of biblical and liturgical symbols *for* the divine procession and return. Far more complex and important is the way that the pattern of procession and reversion informs not just specific symbols but the very process of interpretation, the interpretive *method* in Pseudo-Dionysian biblical hermeneutics and liturgical theology.[57] Thus, the central thesis to be pursued: in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, the scriptures and the liturgy are viewed as the divine procession into the world of the senses; their spiritual interpretation, correspondingly, is part of the divine return which uplifts the faithful.

This perspective on the Areopagite's biblical and liturgical interpretation has emerged from a close terminological analysis of the entire corpus, as documented throughout the following chapters. But allusions to it can be found in a few secondary studies. Regarding the late Neoplatonists' methods of interpreting the literary symbols of their own tradition, James A. Coulter suggested a similar framework, but left it undeveloped.

> The movement, however, is not only in the one direction. Just as Proclus' universe is made up of the complementary processes of procession and reversion, so, too, the symbol not only brings the gods to us, it also lays hold of our spirits and urges us on to an active search for the meaning below the surface, or, in Proclus' terms, for the God who lies concealed behind the demonic facade of myth.[58]

Although our primary goal is a presentation of Pseudo-Dionysius alone, occasional comparisons with his predecessors will be inevitable, not only with patristic exegesis and liturgical exposition, but also with the Neoplatonists' ways of interpreting their authoritative texts and rites.[59]

[55] EH 3 429AB 15-25, cf. EH 2 397A 1-5 and EH 3 440A 4-8.

[56] EH 3 444A 6-16 and 444C. These liturgical features are discussed more thoroughly below, in chapter five.

[57] This tension between symbols *for* procession and return, and the process of their interpretation as part of the return itself, reflects a similar ambiguity in Neoplatonic epistemology: cognition *of* the framework of procession and reversion, versus cognition as itself part of the reversion (Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, pp. 113ff. and 261ff.)

[58] *The Literary Microcosm. Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), p. 57. To be cited as *The Literary Microcosm*.

[59] The comparison with the Neoplatonists needs much more attention. Regarding the interpretation of literature, Hathaway has considered some of the material pertinent to his discussion of the Ninth Epistle (*Hierarchy*, pp. 104-129). But the Coulter volume and new editions of various Neoplatonists provide a foundation for further work in the full

More to the point for the moment is the way that René Roques has made the same suggestion regarding Pseudo-Dionysius himself. Of course Roques discussed "procession and return" as a general hierarchical principle in several places and even joined it to the language of "uplifting" or "anagogy."[60] But he notes its importance for "anagogical" interpretation only rarely. Nevertheless, one passage summarizes the idea splendidly.

> In effect, to discover the profound meaning of the symbols, whether they are dissimilar or similar, we should undertake the inverse movement of that which gave them birth: the divine condescension has disclosed to us its unity in multiplicity, its identity in changing figures, its purely spiritual and simple nature in material and composite forms; by a movement rigorously inverse, our intelligence ought to know how to return from these complex and impure forms to the pure simplicity of God, from their instability to his inalterability, from the multiplicity of their components to his unity. *It is necessary that the anagogy correspond to the condescension.*[61]

The following chapters seek to expand on this single but complex motif. The divine descends into the perceptible plurality of biblical and liturgical symbols (chapter five), even as far "down" as the incongruous representations found in the scriptures (chapter six), in order to uplift the faithful by means of the symbols to their true meanings and "contemplations" (chapter seven).

A thorough development of this theme should begin with the acknowledged epistemological and soteriological character of "procession and return" in Pseudo-Dionysius. The opening paragraph of *The Celestial*

Dionysian corpus. Regarding the interpretation of ritual, a preliminary comparison of Iamblichus and Pseudo-Dionysius is offered in chapter seven, below.

60 Roques, *L'Univers*, pp. 101-111, 120, 283-284; "De l'implication des méthodes théologiques chez le pseudo-Denys," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 30 (1954): 272. This article is also reprinted in Roques, *Structures*, with the pertinent passage on page 148.

61 "Pour découvrir, en effet, le sens profond des symboles, qu'ils soient dissemblables ou ressemblantes, nous devons opérer le mouvement inverse de celui qui les fait naître: la condescendance divine nous a dévoilé son unité dans la multiplicité, son identité dans des figures changeantes, sa nature purement spirituelle et simple dans des formes matérielles et composées; par un mouvement rigoureusement inverse, notre intelligence doit savoir remonter de ces formes complexes et impures à la pure simplicité de Dieu, de leur instabilité à son identité inalterable, de la multiplicité de leurs parties a son unité. *Il faut que l'anagogie réponde à la condescendance.*" Roques, *L'Univers*, p. 208 (emphasis original). See also pp. 299-300, and the term "anagogy" as discussed on p. 204. This quotation gives the misleading impression that the ascent is an active human effort, whereas the Areopagite insists on the passive construction, e.g., "we are uplifted" (see chapter seven below).

Hierarchy frames with two supporting biblical passages the following characteristic formulation:

> Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and, in its power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in.[62]

This particular use of the "exitus-reditus" language concerns neither ontology in the abstract nor the deity in isolation, but rather the manifestation of the divine and the salvation of the human, as other instances of the imagery of light also suggest.[63] The passage continues to interweave the metaphor of downward and upward motion with the imagery of illumination, now specified as "the enlightenments of the most sacred scriptures."[64] At this point the philosophical language of "remaining, procession, and return" leads directly to the main concern of our study.

> Of course this ray never abandons its own proper nature, or its own interior unity. Even though it works itself outwards to multiplicity and proceeds outside of itself as befits its generosity, doing so to lift upward and to unify those beings for which it has a providential responsibility, nevertheless it remains inherently stable and it is forever one with its own unchanging identity. And it grants to creatures the power to rise up, so far as they may, toward itself and it unifies them by way of its own simplified unity. However, this divine ray can enlighten us only by being upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings.[65]

Dionysius goes on to specify the "sacred veils" as the "material guidance" available in the liturgy and the verbal images contained in the scriptures.[66] The expression "upliftingly concealed" raises the two complementary questions now to be pursued regarding Pseudo-Dionysian biblical and liturgical symbolism:[67] how is the divine "concealed" in the veils of the scriptures and of the liturgy, and why is this considered "uplifting" or "anagogical"?

[62] CH 1 120B 7 to 121A 1, Jas. 1.17, Rom. 11.36; cf. CH 8 240A 7-9, CH 9 260B 15-21.

[63] For examples, see CH 3 168A 2-7, CH 13 301A 5-9, EH 5 504D 36 to 505A 3, DN 4 700C 38 to 701A 5.

[64] CH 1 121AB 3-16.

[65] CH 1 121BC 16-27.

[66] CH 1 121C 35 to 124A 5 and 124A 5-15, respectively. The "sacred veils" (*τῶν ἱερῶν παραπετασμάτων*, CH 1 121B 25) are specified in a similar context as "the scriptures and the hierarchical traditions" (DN 1 592B 21f.).

[67] Speaking only of sacramental symbols, Roques summarizes this complementarity with the felicitous phrase "condescendance anagogique" (*L'Univers*, p. 300).

5

The Descent into Symbolism

The Pseudo-Dionysian procession begins in the divine domain of ineffable simplicity and proceeds "down" to the human realm of perceptible plurality, as depicted in the scriptures and the liturgy. We must first rule out any literal application of the idea of procession. The author intends neither a special procession of the thearchy into the physical writings themselves, i.e. bibliolatry, nor a direct pantheism in which the deity actually becomes the material objects used in biblical descriptions, although they do "participate" in the divine. Similarly, he does not advance a special procession of the divinity into the ritual objects themselves, e.g., transubstantiation. Even the most sacred physical objects such as the myron, the bread, and the cup, are not direct emanations of the divine in any sense of a "substantial" presence. Rather, the concept of procession indicates God's self-disclosure under the veil of earthly symbols.

A. The Procession into Plurality

For Dionysius, the divine procession "down" to the scriptures and the liturgy is not an ontological bestowal of being, as in some Neoplatonists, but more a matter of revelation and manifestation. In itself, the divine is absolutely transcendent and unknowable. "The understanding and direct contemplation of Itself is inaccessible to beings, since it actually surpasses being."[1] Nevertheless, the thearchy does manifest itself and the entire celestial sphere in the lower realm of space, time, and sense perception. The mediation of the angelic beings between the transcendent deity and "our" hierarchy is not primarily the creative transmission of existence itself but rather an epistemological transmission of enlightenment. The

[1] DN 1 588C 35-38; see also 588A 5-7, Ep. 1 1065A 9-16, and Ep. 2 1068A to 1069A.

superior celestial beings proportionately transmit to the lower angelic ranks the enlightenments which they have received from above.[2] The last rank of angels enlightens select human beings such as Moses, Joseph of Egypt, Daniel, and those associated with Jesus' birth: Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds.[3]

This revelation or enlightenment is mediated not to human beings at random but to the human hierarchy, namely, in continued hierarchical order first to the hierarchy's leaders and through them to the others.[4] Through this revelatory mediation, that which is transcendent and ineffable "proceeds" down to spatial and sequential plurality in that it is expressed in the human realm of sense perception, language, and symbols.

> The first leaders of our hierarchy received their fill of the sacred gift from the transcendent Deity. Then divine goodness sent them to lead others to this same gift. Like gods, they had a burning and generous urge to secure uplifting and divinisation for their subordinates. And so, using images derived from the senses they spoke of the transcendent. They passed on something united in a variegation and plurality. Of necessity they made human what was divine. They put material on what was immaterial. In their written and unwritten initiations, they brought the transcendent down to our level.[5]

Two key phrases help unlock this complex passage. The first expression, "in their written and unwritten initiations," is not well explained by the modern connotations of the word "initiation." While the term in Pseudo-Dionysius can indicate a rite of initiation or introduction,[6] much more frequently it means a restricted instruction or revelation concerning matters biblical or, more often, liturgical.[7] In fact, their characterization as "written and unwritten" helps identify these initiations as the scriptural and ritual domains in general. Immediately prior to this passage the author has juxtaposed the written scriptures with an initiation

[2] CH 8 240B 23-26, CH 10 273B 6-20, CH 13 301A 5-9, 301C, 304AB, and 305B.

[3] CH 4 180D 46 to 181A 5; CH 9 261B 23f.; CH 4 181BC, cf. CH 9 257C 30 to 260A 6.

[4] CH 9 260A 14f.

[5] EH 1 376D 36-46 (the Göttingen text will read παρέδοσαν in line 46). Cf. CH 2 140A 7f., and Ep. 9 1105BC 28-33.

[6] EH 3 432C 26; cf. EH 7 553D 49.

[7] Timothy's "initiations" concern his spiritual understanding of the scriptures (CH 2 145C 33) and of the liturgical invocations (EH 7 565C 35). While the term appears most frequently concerning the liturgy (EH 3 445C 30, EH 5 504A 7 and 9, EH 7 557C 35, and perhaps CH 3 168A 9), it can also apply to the broader arenas of the legal hierarchy (EH 5 501C 39), "our" hierarchy as a whole (EH 5 501C 39), and the angelic hierarchies (CH 7 209A 7, 209D 37-41).

which is more immaterial because it is unwritten and which is explicitly identified as the liturgical tradition shared only in the exclusive portion of the rites.[8] Thus the text quoted above concerns not just a general hierarchical transmission of the divine in the human, but specifically the role of the scriptures and the liturgy.

The second key phrase, "in a variegation and plurality," helps explain more precisely how the scriptures and the liturgy function in this transmission. It is, therefore, the unifying theme of the material to be examined in this chapter.[9] The central point of this phrase and of the entire passage finds various related expressions. The heavenly and united, the divine and the immaterial, are transmitted in images based on sense perception, in a variety and plurality, in the human and the material. The contrast between the human or material realm and the divine or spiritual sphere centers on the plurality of space and time as perceived by the senses. Along with many Platonists, Pseudo-Dionysius considered the plurality inherent in sense perception to be inferior to the metaphysical unity of the "noetic" realm above space and time.[10] Superior still is the ineffable simplicity of the thearchy. The divine procession into the realm of the senses is therefore a pluralization of the united and simple.[11] Indeed, the extent of the procession corresponds to the extent of the pluralization.[12] Similarly, our Dionysius claims that certain of his treatises increase in length, expanding into a plurality of words proportionate to the descent of their successive subjects from the divine down through the intelligible into the categories of sense perception.[13]

Specifically, the sense of sight depends upon spatial plurality to perceive extension and upon temporal plurality to perceive sequence. These two types of plurality – physical extension and chronological sequence – are the principal components of scriptural and liturgical symbols. Because

[8] EH 1 376BC 22-35. Given this context of biblical and specifically liturgical material, Semmelroth's interpretation of the phrase "written and unwritten" as the written Bible and the unwritten revelation in all creation seems too general. "Gottes ausstrahlendes Licht. Zur Schöpfungs und Offenbarungslehre des Ps. Dionysius Areopagita," *Scholastik* 28 (1953): 500f.

[9] ποικιλίᾳ καὶ πλήθει, EH 1 376D 42f. The former term means the fragmentation of what was originally united. Cf. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, no. 21 (Dodds, pp. 24-25).

[10] For metaphysical discussion of the "one" and the "many," see DN 2 649C, DN 4 705C, 709BC, DN 13 977C, and 980A.

[11] CH 1 121B 19 (quoted above, chapter four, note 65).

[12] DN 5 820D 47 to 821A 1. Cf. DN 2 644A 2.

[13] MT 3 1033C 30-33. Conversely, words become fewer in the ascent toward the ineffable beyond all human categories, whether perception or intelligence. Regarding the sequence of treatises, see notes 41-44 below and section C, "The Structural Unity of the Corpus," in chapter eight below.

symbols are based on sense perception, they are inherently plural and composite. It is their very function to express in terms of perceptible plurality that which is metaphysically simple, namely a concept or idea. The Dionysian hierarch transmits a spiritual interpretation of the liturgy and of the Bible by his "condescending" use of the pluralities of symbols.[14] The transmission of the Bible is symbolized by the placing of the scriptures upon his head during his ordination.[15] Thus in its biblical and liturgical composition, the entire human hierarchy is characterized by the multiplicity inherent in symbols. "Our" hierarchy is "pluralized in a variegation of perceptible symbols."[16]

This theme is not restricted to the hierarchical treatises. A text from *The Divine Names* can summarize the general motif of "variegation and plurality."

> We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love toward humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of the senses. And so it is that the transcendent is clothed in the terms of being, with shape and form on things which have neither, and numerous symbols are employed to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supra-natural simplicity.[17]

Since the "hierarchical traditions" are elsewhere specified as liturgical, here too the "sacred veils" indicate the Bible and the liturgy.[18]

B. Space in the Bible

The divine and the celestial spheres are expressed in human terms in that they are variegated or "broken down" to the level of space and time, and are presented to the physical senses in the scriptures and the liturgy. Yet neither the entire Bible nor all of the liturgy is given equal attention in these writings. In both cases, the careful reader can detect a subtle but consistent selectivity. The division of the biblical material into didactic and

[14] EH 3 429B 15-18.

[15] EH 5 513C to 516A 1.

[16] EH 1 373A 11; cf. EH 5 501D 44f.

[17] DN 1 592B 20-27. Other references to variegation and plurality concern the angels' freedom from this multiplicity in their "noetic" life (CH 7 208BC 27-44, and DN 7 868B 17-20, but see also DN 12 972B 21-23 where some type of angelic variegation is mentioned), and of course the procession's counterpoint considered in Part Three, namely, the uplifting "from the variegated and pluralized symbols" (DN 4 705B 19-21; DN 4 701B 21-24, DN 7 873A 1-3, DN 11 948D 9f., and Ep. 9 1112A 9-11).

[18] CH 2 145C 32, EH 1 372A 3, EH 6 532D 43; cf. CH 1 121B 25.

symbolic passages has already been discussed.[19] Yet the author's conception of symbolism is so broad, covering all uses of language,[20] that further selectivity is inevitable. *The Celestial Hierarchy*, for example, at first purports to consider the angelic hierarchies as revealed in the scriptures.[21] But what Dionysius actually intends is the more limited investigation of only their alleged physical forms.[22] His concern for their "material figures and forms" [23] is consummated in the work's last chapter, devoted entirely to the exegesis of biblical references to angelic shapes and appearances. Alongside this clear agenda is his unannounced but pervasive penchant for names, in this case, those of the nine angelic ranks.

The Celestial Hierarchy's concluding chapter presents an extensive battery of biblical symbols and their interpretation.[24] Every example and every explanation concerns the physical appearances ascribed to angelic beings. Pride of place is given to the symbol of fire, interpreted to resemble the deity in its immateriality, illumination, and power.[25] Anthropomorphic characterizations are then taken up, with interpretations offered for general human features and for specific organs and senses.[26] The power of hearing, for example, reveals the "ability to have a knowing share of divine inspiration." [27] The author explicates the biblical references to angelic garments and instruments, to winds and clouds, to stones and their colors.[28] Considerable attention is paid to the portrayal of angels in terms of such animals as the lion, cow, eagle, and horse.[29] While a few immaterial characteristics such as courage and joy are mentioned,[30] the chapter as a whole concerns perceptible images based upon material

[19] Ep. 9 1105D 45 to 1108A 7.

[20] DN 4 709BCD 24-28 and 40-45.

[21] CH 1 121A 6-11.

[22] CH 2 136D 8 to 137A 3, CH 4 177BC 5-7.

[23] CH 1 121C 31f.; cf. CH 1 121C 33, 124A 13f., and "diagrammed by variegated forms" in Ep. 9 1108C 42.

[24] Is the entire chapter the *confirmatio* of a carefully structured rhetorical argument? Giuseppa Saccaro Battisti finds in this treatise a detailed and elaborate structure, here only outlined: exordium (chapters 1-2), narratio (3-5), divisio (6-10), confutatio (11-14), confirmatio (15) and conclusio (the final sentence of 15); "Strutture e figure retoriche nel 'de Caelesti Hierarchia' dello Pseudo-Dionigi: Un mezzo di espressione dell'ontologia Neoplatonica," *Archivio di Filosofia* 51 (1983): 293-319.

[25] CH 15 328C to 329C.

[26] CH 15 329C to 332D.

[27] CH 15 332A 13f. The angels' "uplifting" wings are included under the discussion of their feet (CH 15 332CD).

[28] CH 15 333ABC, 333C to 336B, 336BC.

[29] CH 15 336D to 337B.

[30] CH 15 337B 25-27; 340A 7-16.

plurality, i.e. spatial extension, rather than the attitudes or activities of the angels.

The second focus of the Areopagite's exegetical selectivity in *The Celestial Hierarchy* is on the names of the nine angelic groups. Well known is the author's interest in the scriptural names for God, but no less consistent is his concern for the "nine revealing names" of the angels in the scriptures.[31] Whenever he presents one of these ranks, he begins with an interpretation of its name, since "the designations given to these heavenly intelligences signify the mode in which they take on the imprint of God." [32] In the supreme triad, for example, "the name of the seraphim clearly teaches" their warming and heating properties.[33] The same honor is paid to the names of "dominions, powers and authorities," and, in an astounding array of puns and word plays, to the designation "principality." [34] The name "angel" is given particular attention, both because it applies to the entire celestial hierarchy, and also because this "announcing" function of the celestial beings is essential to the author's understanding of their primary role, the mediating enlightenment of the lower orders.[35] It is the strict hierarchical order of this function which necessitates an elaborate explanation of Isaiah's apparent cleansing by a seraph. Thus, Isaiah 6:6 is given an entire chapter of interpretation, not to explain an angelic shape or name but because in the Areopagite's system a seraph should cleanse a human being only through the mediation of a lower angel.[36]

Yet such concern for the angelic names in isolation from their exegetical contexts stems not so much from a principle of biblical hermeneutics as from the author's general interest in etymology and word games. This unknown writer, who so brilliantly chose the name "Dionysius" for his pseudonym, pursued the significance of all names, whether angelic or divine, scriptural or liturgical, proper or common.[37]

[31] CH 6 200D 17f., cf. CH 7 205B 14-17.

[32] CH 7 205B 5f., cf. CH 8 237C 8-10.

[33] CH 7 205BC 17-26, see also CH 13 300BC 10-20 and EH 4 481C 25-35; for the cherubim (an "outpouring" or χύσις of wisdom), see CH 7 205C 26-32; for thrones, see CH 7 205CD 32-45; on the triad as a whole, see CH 7 205B 7-15 and CH 13 304A 6-11.

[34] CH 8 237C to 240B, CH 9 257B.

[35] CH 5 196BCD, CH 4 181A-D.

[36] Dionysius laboriously concludes that it *was* an angel who purified Isaiah but who simultaneously attributed his power to the seraphim (CH 13 305C to 308A)!

[37] Allusions to proper names have rarely been identified in the corpus but could conceivably yield some autobiographical clues. In DN 2 649D 40f., *ὁ πολὺς τὰ θεῖα* could be a pun on "Paul the divine" as in DN 3 681A 13f. W. Strothmann sees in the use of

Perhaps the majority of his subtle plays on words have yet to be noticed, even though his fondness of puns seems almost announced: "In my way of speaking, holiness (ἁγιότης) is freedom from all defilement (ἄγους)."[38] The primary exegetical concern of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, therefore, remains the angels' material appearances, an emphasis also apparent when the subject turns to the deity itself.

The divine, like the angelic, can be presented as "variegated in figurative symbols" in the scriptures.[39] Some passages present

> sacred pictures boldly used to represent God, so that what is hidden may be brought out into the open and multiplied, what is unique and undivided may be divided up, and multiple shapes and forms be given to what has neither shape nor form.[40]

According to the author's own testimony, three treatises and one lengthy letter consider the scriptural statements about God. From the perspective of a divine procession down into plurality, which is the subject of "affirmative theology," the sequence of these writings is as follows: "The Theological Representations," *The Divine Names*, and then "The Symbolic Theology" (and its summary in *The Ninth Letter*). The first begins with the oneness of God, proceeds to the divine "threeness," and eventually to the incarnation.[41] The subsequent concern in *The Divine Names* for the various intelligible and bodiless names for God in the Bible[42] is explicitly contrasted with the further descent of "The Symbolic Theology" into symbols which are perceptible and embodied, that is, based upon the senses.[43] In keeping with the increased plurality of its subject matter, this consideration of anthropomorphic and other perceptible symbols for God is said to be lengthier than the two former treatises.[44] These same subjects are treated in *The Ninth Letter* which thus parallels chapter fifteen of *The*

γραφεῦς (EH 4 473C 31, 37, and 41) a pun on γναφεῦς, namely, an allusion to Peter the Fuller. *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe*, LVI.

38 ὡς καθ' ἡμᾶς εἰπεῖν, DN 12 969B 13f. (Would he say in English that holiness is hole-less?) Other word plays include ὑποφήτην and προφήτου in CH 13 300B 9 and 15, καλοῦν and κάλλος in DN 4 701C 39f., ἥλιος and ἀολλῆ in DN 4 700B 27f., and perhaps λέοντος and ῥωμαλέον in CH 15 336D 38f.

39 Ep. 9 1108C 38f.

40 Ep. 9 1105BC 29-33.

41 MT 3 1033A 9f. This treatise is apparently summarized at the outset of *The Divine Names* (DN 1 589D to 592B) and perhaps in the first four letters. The overall sequence of treatises is taken up more fully in chapter eight, below.

42 DN 1 597B 23, DN 9 913B 20f., MT 3 1033A 11-14.

43 DN 9 913B 21-23; DN 1 597AB 10-19, MT 3 1033AB 14-22, Ep. 9 1104B 8f., 1113BC 22-30.

44 MT 3 1033B 22-26.

Celestial Hierarchy in its concern for material descriptions as opposed to isolated names.

Overall, the author's exegetical selectivity is quite consistent. Rarely treating even one entire verse, he prefers instead to isolate the names and visual representations of the angels and of God. He can marshall other texts to support specific points, such as the mediating role of the angels, but his basic exegetical concern is not for the activities, but for the appearances ascribed to the celestial beings. Strikingly absent, for example, is Jacob's ladder of descending and ascending angels. In fact, chapter fifteen of *The Celestial Hierarchy* presents angels who seem quite immobile. Like still-life portraits in a celestial gallery, these characterizations often employ the plurality of spatial extension but rarely that of temporal sequence. It may be that this emphasis was designed to counter Origen's idea of ethereal angelic bodies by repeatedly giving immaterial interpretations to physical descriptions.[45] But the Pseudo-Areopagite is equally insistent that not only the angels but also the immaterial God is pluralized, that is, expressed in the plurality of material images. To help in explicating the specific shapes and forms of God in "The Symbolic Theology," he even provided interpretations for the three spatial dimensions in the abstract.

> You may, if you wish, attribute to the intangible and unshaped God the three dimensions of bodies so that His breadth is the immensity of His procession to all things, His length is His powers surpassing the universe, His depth the hiddenness and unknowing incomprehensible to all creatures.[46]

This emphasis on spatial symbolism seems to have an internal rationale which can be appreciated only when the author's contrasting emphasis within the liturgical sphere is also noted.

C. Time in the Liturgy

The divine procession into the plurality of symbols is equally selective in the liturgical realm. Or rathern to put it more objectively, the author of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* emphasized a specific type of liturgical phenomena as symbolic of the divine. The question is not primarily the selection of or emphasis upon an entire rite, although this bears further study.[47] It is rather *within* the standard rituals that the author's selective

[45] E.g., *de Princ.*, 1.8.1.

[46] DN 9 913AB 13-18 (Ephesians 3.18); cf. CH 2 144C 34 to 145A 4.

[47] Is the consecration of the altar, for example, only mentioned and not fully presented (EH 4 484C 36f. and 484D 42) because it does not fit into the triadic frame-

emphasis is significant. The nature of liturgical symbols is best illustrated by that "variegated and sacred composition of symbols,"[48] the synaxis. The united and simple synaxis proceeds into symbolic plurality in that it is "pluralized in a sacred variegation of symbols."[49] As in the scriptures, the divine and intelligible unity is expressed in a humanly perceptible plurality. Yet here, too, a subtle pattern of selectivity is apparent. Even the casual reader of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* can notice the persistent emphasis upon the actions, the movements and events, and the sequence of activities. In both baptism and the synaxis, the focus is on what happens, on the gestures and movements expecially of the hierarch who processes, seals with the sign of the cross, anoints, consecrates the water, and baptizes;[50] he censes, greets with a kiss, washes, elevates, and distributes.[51] This selective focus should not be taken for granted, especially when the comparative disinterest in liturgical words and objects is noted.

Throughout the discussion of the synaxis, and indeed in the entire corpus, no specific liturgical words are ever considered. Not only is no homily even mentioned, but the liturgical texts themselves are never divulged, much less interpreted. The Lord's Prayer, for example, and the *sursum corda*, a convenient support for the author's theme of elevation, are passed by in silence. Even in his clear references to the "alleluia" the author carefully avoids the actual word and at one point even translates it into Greek rather than mention it.[52] Thus not just certain invocations, as the author suggests,[53] but every liturgical text remains unwritten, at least in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. This silence is only partially explained by the desire for secrecy, especially since the entire treatise seems intended for the exclusive use of the hierarch.[54] The de-emphasis of liturgical texts leaves two possible candidates for the attention of the author: the sacred objects and the ceremonial activities.

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work? Is the sacrament of myron given equal status with the synaxis because the monophysitic Christology implied in its mixture of substances (EH 4 477C, 480A) would thus receive apostolic authority? (W. Strothmann, *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe*, LVI).

[48] EH 3 428A 11f.; cf. EH 4 485B 18.

[49] EH 3 429A 10f.

[50] EH 2 393A 1 to 397A 5; see R. Roques, "Le sens du Baptême selon le Pseudo-Denys," *Irénikon* 31 (1958): 427-449.

[51] EH 3 425B 20 to 428A 6.

[52] EH 4 485A 15-18; cf. EH 2 396C 33f. and EH 4 473A 9f.

[53] EH 7 565C 30-34.

[54] EH 1 377A 5-8; see the following discussion on secrecy as a motive.

The emphasis upon actions rather than objects is most apparent at the beginning and the conclusion of the synaxis.[55] First, the procession and return of the divinity is symbolized by the hierarch's initial censing procession "into every section of the sacred place," and by his return to the altar where he began.[56] The emphasis is squarely upon this movement; no attention is given to the static appearances of the building, the censer, or the hierarch himself. Nowhere in the corpus does the author directly describe the room or building in which this or any liturgical act takes place. The actual apparatus used in censing is not mentioned nor is the hierarch's own appearance a concern, for nowhere in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* are clerical vestments ever mentioned or interpreted. This type of motionless, material symbolism would be more consistent with the biblical representations of the angels found in chapter fifteen of *The Celestial Hierarchy* where, in fact, there appears the author's only reference to a clerical garment.[57]

The climactic conclusion of the synaxis provides the central image of the divine "pluralization": the hierarch's division and manifestation of the bread and the cup as a symbol of the incarnation. In one sense, the emphasis on the hierarch's activity is heightened by minimizing the role of the recipients. The central actions are those of this "bishop," that principal mediator of the divine who divides, elevates, communes, invites, and imparts.[58] Since he does invite the others and imparts communion to them, it follows that there were some other recipients, but the timing and manner of reception from their point of view is never discussed.[59]

More importantly, the focus is not on the bread and the cup as material objects, but on the activities concerning them. In and of themselves as objects, the eucharistic elements have a secondary value because they are the body's communion and not the soul's contemplation and understanding.[60] Furthermore, the contemplation and understanding of these elements even as symbols does not concern their material form, of which nothing is ever said. The shape, size, or type of bread is of no interest to Dionysius. The contents of the cup, whether wine with water or without,

[55] The synaxis also expresses a few human conditions, such as the unity and cleanliness expressed in the kiss and the washing, respectively (EH 3 437A 440AB).

[56] EH 3 425B 21-25, as discussed above in chapter four, nn. 53-56; see also EH 3 428D 41 to 429A 2, EH 4 476D 38-45.

[57] CH 15 333A 10 as an interpretation, apparently, of Ezek. 10.6f. and perhaps also of Ezek. 9.2, Dan. 10.5f., and Rev. 1.14. See also CH 8 241C 36.

[58] EH 3 425D 46 to 428A 7, 444D 45 to 445A 7.

[59] It is also suggested that the others only see the sacred symbols (EH 3 428A 2f.)

[60] EH 7 565B 23-27.

are never even mentioned. His concern is rather what *happens* to these objects, the activity which brings them from hidden unity to revealed plurality. "When he uncovers the veiled gifts, when he makes a multiplicity of what had originally been one," [61] the hierarch symbolizes the incarnation, that supreme occasion when the simple and hidden became compound and revealed. It is this process of division and manifestation which receives the emphasis and which is in fact the primary "sacred-act" of the synaxis:

> The bread which had been covered and undivided is now uncovered and divided into many parts. Similarly, the hierarch shares the one cup with all, symbolically multiplying and distributing the One in symbolic fashion. With these things he completes the most holy sacred-act. For because of His goodness and His love for humanity, the simple, hidden oneness of Jesus, the most divine Word, has taken the route of incarnation for us and, without undergoing any change, has become a reality that is composite and visible.[62]

At one point the Areopagite does suggest a "consecration" of the eucharistic elements, and at another point he says that they symbolize Christ apart from and even before the hierarch's dividing and distributing.[63] But the crucial and thrice-repeated sentence, "he performs the most divine acts and lifts into view the things praised," [64] concerns not the elements themselves but rather what the hierarch does to them. He does not "consecrate" objects but "sacredly performs" the most divine acts, namely the symbolic re-enactment of Christ's own activities.[65] The

[61] EH 3 444C 28-30.

[62] EH 3 444A 6-14. The second half of this motif, namely the return from plurality to unity, receives less attention in this text, but it is mentioned: just as the pluralization of the incarnation brought about "our" unity with God, so the distributed elements unite the recipients in a communal sharing (EH 3 444AB 14-17, 444C 30-44).

[63] *ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα σύμβολα χριστοειδῶς ἐπιλέγειν* Ep. 8 1092C 30. The nearness of the saints to Christ is symbolized by the reading of their names immediately after the eucharistic elements are placed on the altar, even though the central activities regarding these elements have not yet taken place (EH 3 437C 32-38; cf. 440B 19-26).

[64] *ἱερουργεῖ τὰ θειότατα καὶ ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγει τὰ ὑμνημένα* EH 3 425D 47-49, 440B 27f., 444A 4f.

[65] EH 3 441CD 33-45. This view of *ἱερουργέω* as a broad term meaning "to do or perform sacredly" rather than the specific "to consecrate" is supported by its wide range of occurrences in which no objects are set aside or sanctified but rather certain actions or processes are sacredly carried out: love (EH 1 376A 5), assembling towards the one (EH 3 424D 24), deification (EH 3 436C 36), the kiss of peace (EH 3 437A 4 and 14, EH 5 513B 22), communion (EH 4 472D 6), perfection (EH 4 477C 29), a sacred approach (EH 5 516B 11f.), an invocation (EH 6 533A 10), or salvation itself (EH 7 565B 29). Similarly, the noun form *ἱερουργία* is never used to mean the consecration of an object but is rather a general term for the sacred performance of the commandments (EH 2 392A 11f., 392B 20) or the sacred

main point is not that Jesus' body is expressed in the spatial plurality of the material bread, but that his *becoming* a human body is seen in the sequential plurality of the one loaf becoming many pieces. This emphasis on events rather than words or objects applies not just to the synaxis but to all the rites of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.[66]

D. MOTIVES

The Areopagite's patterns of emphasis regarding biblical and liturgical symbols bring us to the midpoint of this study and to its pivotal question: Why? First, why did the deity descend into the plurality of scriptural and ritual symbolism ? To pose the same question from another perspective, why do the Bible and the liturgy exist at all? Thus far, this chapter has presented them as the endpoints of the divine procession "down" into the plurality inherent in human sense perception. But Pseudo-Dionysius more

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functions of the hierarch (EH 5 505B 19, 508A 1) and the priests (EH 5 505D 43, 508A 4), as mentioned above in chapter three. This word family is not involved in the only clear consecrations of objects: the baptismal water (EH 2 396C 30f., with καθαγιάζω) and the myron. No special verb expresses the consecration of the myron in the rite's description in EH 4 473A; the hierarch merely "completes the perfecting prayer on it" (καὶ τὴν ἐπ' αὐτῷ τελουμένην εὐχὴν ἀποπληρώσας, EH 4 473A 10f.). Later on, the myron is referred to as "sanctified" (ἁγιαζομένῳ τῷ θείῳ μύρῳ, EH 4 484A 8).

[66] In the chapter on baptism, the process of changing clothes is more important than the appearance or "light-like" color of the baptismal garment (EH 2 396A 12f., 396D 46f., 401A 8-12, 404C 29-33, and EH 6 536B 13-16). The action of pouring myron on the water is significant as a symbol of Christ entering the tomb (EH 2 396C, EH 4 484B) but the containers of these liquids are nowhere described. (Was the font octagonal? in a separate building?) Nor does the water itself, whether cold and running or tepid and still, matter as much as its actions of cleansing (EH 2 397B) and, like the tomb, receiving the candidate three times (EH 2 404B). The twelve flaps over the myron (EH 4 477A 8) are important not for their unspecified color or shape but for their function in covering a sacred thing, like the seraphic wings (EH 4 473B, 480B to 484A). The myron itself, whose composition is never stated, is not passively sensed as an object but, like Christ, it actively spreads and fills the senses (EH 4 477C 34-37, 480AB). We learn that the "table" is kissed by the hierarch (EH 2 393C), that certain objects are placed upon the altar, especially the anointing myron (EH 4 484C 36 to 485A 2), and that the altar is Christ-like in its sanctifying sacrifice (EH 4 485A); yet its physical appearance is never mentioned. Distinctions between clerical ranks are symbolized not by the material appearances of their vestments but by the ritual events in their ordinations, e.g., the placing of the scriptures (whose appearance as codex or scroll is, typically, not specified) on the hierarch's head (EH 5 513C), or the bending of one or both knees by the deacons or priests, respectively (EH 5 513D to 516B). The change in hierarchical order which occurs in the tonsure ceremony is signaled by the process of changing clothes, but the appearance of the monk's new garment is left undescribed (EH 6 532B 26f., 536B 11-13). In the funeral service, the appearance of the deceased, his clothing or coffin, is left to the imagination, but his placement during the ceremony and afterward is emphasized as symbolic of his hierarchical rank (EH 7 556C 25-29, 557A, 565B).

often presents them as the starting points of the opposite movement, namely a return "up" from the plurality of symbols. The question of the procession's purpose leads us first to the Dionysian rationale for symbolism in general, and then (in chapter six) to the reason for incongruous biblical symbols in particular, where the perspective of a return "upward" is even more apparent.

There is a second question of motive implied in the first question and subordinate to it: why does the author suggest a difference between the nature of the perceptible plurality involved in biblical symbols and that in the symbols of the liturgy? To summarize the two types of variegation, we recall the passages discussed in the middle of chapter four.[67] In the former text, the starting point for the uplifting movement was the material plurality of the scriptural representations of the angels. In the latter passage, which introduced the sacrament of myron, the starting point for the same uplifting movement was the sequential plurality of the rite's activities in their order. Only when the central, "uplifting" role of symbols in general has been discussed (chapter seven) can this difference of emphasis between spatial and temporal plurality be evaluated (chapter eight).

To start with a very preliminary answer to the first question of motive, the divine descends into perceptible plurality because it can do so. That is, statements based on sense perception can be used to express the intelligible realm because such statements are, in some remote way, correct. In Pseudo-Dionysian metaphysics, all beings participate to some degree in "being" and in the "good." [68] In his epistemology, therefore, even statements transferred from perceptible beings to the divine being are, to some degree, accurate. "Our sense perception also can properly be described as echoes of wisdom." [69] But the theoretical admissibility of such statements as remotely true does not yet explain the motives for their use. The outward appearances of biblical and liturgical symbolism serve two fundamental purposes, the first regarding the unsacred "others" from whom perceptible symbols conceal spiritual meanings, the second regarding "us" for whom the symbols are primarily intended.[70]

[67] CH 4 177BC 3-8 and EH 4 472D in chapter four, notes 21 and 22.

[68] CH 4 177C 19-21; CH 2 141C 31-34, DN 4 720B 15f.

[69] DN 7 868C 31-33. Thus intelligible bravery, goodness, union, and life have their faint echoes in, respectively, anger (CH 15 337B 27), the sun (DN 4 697C 39, 720A 4), desire (DN 4 720C 31), and plants (DN 6 856B 20). Even matter echoes intelligible beauty (CH 2 144B 25-28).

[70] "Das Symbol is zugleich offenbarend und verhüllend." O. Semmelroth, *Scholastik* 27, p. 10.

Concealment from an "outgroup" is, of course, not a motive for the divine procession in itself, but rather for its use of the enigmatic and symbolic in that descent. In both the liturgical and the biblical domains, symbols based on sense perception serve to conceal intelligible truths from the uninitiated, from those who perceive only the external appearances of the symbols and are excluded from their inner meanings.[71] In liturgical matters this principle of secrecy is invoked in two different ways and in each case on several different levels. On the one hand, certain liturgical symbols are themselves to be concealed, even in their outward and uninterpreted form. The myron, for example, is not directly seen by the lay multitude but is concealed from their view by the clerics.[72] On a more basic level, the lowest lay orders who attend the synaxis can experience only the "common part of the sacred-act" before they are dismissed. "For not everyone is holy nor is knowledge for all, as the scriptures say." [73] At the lowest level of the hierarchy, only the catechumens are dismissed from the latter part of the funeral service.[74] This type of concealment protects not only the sanctity of the symbols but also the tender "eyes" of the uninitiated who could be harmed by premature illumination.[75]

On the other hand, it is not just the sight of the liturgical symbols which is concealed but also and especially their interpretation. In their exterior appearances, the symbols are useless,[76] and some interpretation is needed even of those symbols which are observed by all in the common portion of the synaxis. Regarding baptism, it seems at first that no one who is not already initiated can approach the rite at all.[77] Yet the author also distinguishes between an introductory visual image of cleansing, which is a meaning sufficient for the uninitiated, and the more spiritual interpretation proportionately given to the other orders.[78] Furthermore, without such interpretation the external appearances of infant baptism or a funeral would provoke only laughter among the unsacred onlookers.[79] Thus Timothy is warned at the outset of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* to

[71] This exclusion is deserved, claims Dennis, because the divine illumination is given to all (CH 9 260D 47 to 261A 2), even though not all are suited to receive it (DN 4 697D 43-46) and some even turn away (EH 2 397D 36 to 400A 16).

[72] EH 4 476BC 11-31.

[73] EH 1 376C 32-35 (1 Cor. 8.7).

[74] EH 7 557C 27-34.

[75] EH 2 396C. The Göttingen text omits EH 7 557C 40-42.

[76] EH 3 428A 8-13, reading ἀνόνητος for ἀνόητος, with the Göttingen text, although the Migne reading is also plausible on internal grounds.

[77] EH 2 392C 31f.

[78] EH 2 397C 23-26; see chapter three, n. 115.

[79] EH 7 565D 40 to 568A 2 and 556D 51 to 557A 3, respectively.

preserve this intelligent and invisible knowledge from the uninitiated and to share the sacred enlightenments with only the sacred.[80] The book's explanations for the symbols, in summary, are shared with the initiators, but not directly with those yet being initiated.[81]

The same motive of secrecy applies to the use of biblical symbols. Such appearances protect "from the crowds the understanding of that which is ineffable and invisible," so that the "holy of holies" might be preserved unpolluted.[82] Here too Timothy is instructed to withdraw the holy things from the unsacred crowd, for it is not right to cast mental pearls before the swine.[83] The clearest summary of this motivation for veiling the intelligible realm in the lower arena of sense perception can also serve to introduce the second and principal motive:

> Now there are two reasons for creating types for the typeless, for giving shape to what is actually without shape. First, we lack the ability to be directly raised up to intelligible contemplations. We need our own upliftings that come naturally to us and which can raise before us the permitted forms of the marvelous and unformed sights. Second, it is most fitting to the mysterious passages of scripture that the sacred and hidden truth about the celestial intelligences be concealed through the inexpressible and sacred and be inaccessible to the *hoi polloi*.[84]

The divine proceeds down to perceptible symbols not only to be concealed from the uninitiated but also, and indeed primarily, to be accommodated to the limited human level of comprehension among the faithful. The passage discussed at the beginning of this chapter continues with the two motives for "variegation and plurality" in biblical and liturgical symbols.

[80] EH 1 372A 4-9.

[81] EH 1 377A 5-8; cf. Ep. 9 1104B 15f. At the beginning of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* the treatise seems intended for Timothy and only the "sacred-initiators" of his own order (EH 1 377A 12-16). In this case, "sacred-initiator" means either "cleric" in general (as in EH 5 516A 9) or more likely the single order of hierarchs (as in EH 5 512B 18 and Ep. 8 1088D 46). Yet the "Contemplation" in each chapter surely informs the "contemplative" lay order and especially the monks who intelligently contemplate every sacred act (EH 6 532D 39f.). Perhaps this apparent conflict is resolved if the treatise itself was a handbook for the exclusive use of the hierarchs, and yet the interpretations it contains were shared by them with the lower orders in due proportion.

[82] Ep. 9 1105C 37-39 and 1108A 7f.

[83] CH 2 145C 30-38.

[84] CH 2 140AB 7-18. On secrecy in general, see MT 1 1000A 4f.; on the "mysterious" or "mystical" scriptures, see CH 2 140C 29f., EH 2 404C 27, EH 3 441B 20-22, and EH 4 484B 24.

> [They transmitted the celestial in perceptible images] not simply because of the profane from whom the symbols were to be kept out of reach, but because, as I have already stated, our own hierarchy is itself symbolical and adapted to what we are. In a divine fashion it needs perceptible things to lift us up from them into the domain of intellect.[85]

Assertions that "we" or "our hierarchy" have a need for perceptible symbols do not yet provide much detail regarding Pseudo-Dionysian anthropology. The expression "proportionately to ourselves" and the many similar qualifiers ("as far as is possible to us," "as permitted to us," etc.) do not reveal the specific nature of this human need. We read that "the divine things are revealed and beheld according to the proportion of each mind" and that the divinity, which is inaccessible in and of itself, is manifested in "proportionate enlightenments." [86] Yet the nature of this limitation in the human capacity to receive enlightenment or to know at all is still not specified.

In one isolated passage, the "proportionality" in all human knowledge is linked to a "divided" part of the soul, called "passible," which uses representations and symbols, as opposed to an undivided, impassible part of the soul which sees the simple and innermost visions of the images.[87] The Areopagite's basic concern is for the former type of knowing which inescapably begins with the senses in the use of perceptible symbols. At another point, souls in general (not divided into passible and impassible) are characterized as "inferior to the united minds because of the divided and manifold nature of their variegation" in using the physical senses.[88] Yet in its full context this is not a distinction internal to the human composition, but rather the difference between a human soul and an

[85] EH 1 (376D) 377A 1-5. The two motives in this passage also appear in CH 2 145A 8-10, Ep. 9 1105C 36-45, and 1108A 7-20. For a similar pair of motives for figurative expressions, see Proclus, *In Rempublicam*, 1: 85.26 to 86.23 (Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm*, p. 50).

[86] DN 1 588A 12f., 588C 45f.; see "enlightenments given proportionately," CH 3 164D 6f.

[87] *τὸ μὲν ἀπαθὲς τῆς ψυχῆς .... τὸ παθητικὸν δὲ αὐτῆς*, Ep. 9 1108A 13-20. This distinction within the soul may be traced to Neoplatonic psychology. Plotinus held that at least part of the soul remains in constant contact with the *nous*, while Iamblichus advanced the more "pessimistic" view that the entire soul falls into the inferior realm. For the most recent investigation of this subject, see Carlos G. Steel, *The Changing Self. A Study of the Soul in Later Neoplatonism* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1978). But the most striking precedent for this idea of a "passible" part of the soul is Evagrius Ponticus: *τὸ παθητικὸν μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς*, *Praktikos* 78 (Sources Chrétiennes 171), (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1972), p. 666.

[88] DN 7 868C 27-33.

angelic mind. The contrast between human and angelic knowledge highlights most clearly "our" hierarchy's need for accommodation. The angels' knowledge is immaterial and united, free from plurality, from components, and from the physical senses.[89] They are enlightened more clearly and more intelligently than humans are.

> [The gift is given] in a more immaterial and intellectual fashion to those who are blessedly above this world. (For it is not from without that God stirs them towards the divine. Rather he does so *via* the intellect and from within and He willingly enlightens them with a ray that is pure and immaterial.) As for us, this gift which the heavenly beings have received uniquely and unitedly has been passed on to us by the divinely-transmitted scriptures in a way suited to us, that is, by means of the variety and abundance of composite symbols.[90]

In contrast to most human discourse, the angels' conversations are internal or telepathic![91]

Thus, the divine proceeds into the plurality of spatial and temporal symbols primarily to accommodate itself to the human way of knowing which is tied to the lower realm of sense perception. The descent into multiplicity is necessitated by the human dependence upon extension in space and upon sequence in time as the starting points for knowledge. The Areopagite offers no extended explanation of this dependence. Yet it is also presupposed in his eschatology which, while rarely mentioned in the entire corpus, is consistent with the difference between celestial minds and human capabilities. In this life, the divine things are veiled in the perceptible forms of divided symbols.[92] But in the future and angelic state, "we" shall receive the divine light "in an impassible and immaterial mind."[93] Until then, humanity must employ symbols for the divine things and be raised by them to the intelligible truth.[94]

The primary emphasis is not on a human limitation in itself, but on the provision made by the deity for humanity, namely, on the providential accommodation:

> The word of God makes use of poetic imagery when discussing these formless intelligences but, as I have already said, it does so not for the sake of art, but as a concession to the nature of our own mind. It uses scriptural

89 DN 7 868B 13-25; ἀΰλως καὶ ἀμιγῶς, CH 4 180A 11, DN 4 693C 23f.
90 EH 1 376B 16-23, cf. EH 1 372A 14.
91 EH 4 480C 31-34, 481C 24-26.
92 DN 1 592B 20-27, quoted more fully above in note 17 ("We now ...").
93 ἐν ἀπαθεῖ καὶ ἀΰλῳ τῷ νῷ DN 1 592BC 27-40.
94 DN 1 592C 40-44.

> passages in an uplifting fashion as a way, provided for us from the first, to uplift our mind in a manner suitable to our nature.[95]

Our author frequently linked the "providence" of the thearchy and of the supreme angelic beings with their "procession" toward the inferior beings.[96] Toward humanity, the divine "provision" consists of providing perceptible forms for transcendent things, namely the procession into the realm of the senses. "The most sacred wisdom of the scriptures ... carefully provided for each one in the forms of the heavenly minds."[97] This divine forethought is equally apparent in the sacramental realm where divine matters are also accommodated to human capabilities. The "contemplation" of baptism begins by calling the reflections which represent that sacrament "natural reflections suited to the human intellect."[98]

To summarize: for motives of secrecy and especially accommodation to human capabilities, the united and simple deity expresses itself in multiple and compound symbols. This adaptation to the physical senses has its ultimate purpose in the upward return of those who contemplate the sacred symbols. Although the motif of "uplifting" is therefore already in view, the procession itself has not yet reached its nadir. In the case of biblical symbols, the divine procession descends not merely down to the human level, but also below it, stooping even to some obviously incongruous comparisons of the heavenly beings with base material creatures.

[95] CH 2 137B 15-20.

[96] Thus members of the same rank interact with each other equally, while the lower orders relate to the higher ones "returningly" (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς) and the superior ranks relate to the inferior "providentially" (προνοητικῶς). See the statements in CH 15 333D 41, 337B 18-20, DN 4 696B 11-13, 704B 27-29, 704D 44f., 708A 8-10, 709D 45-50, 713AB 8-14, DN 9 912D 33-38, and DN 12 972B 21-23. In DN 4 712A 1-6 and 15f., Dionysius credits this Neoplatonic pattern to Hierotheus. The single exception to the pattern is "returning ... providence" in CH 15 333B 24f. For a more general discussion, see Bernhard Brons, "Pronoia und das Verhältnis von Metaphysik und Geschichte bei Dionysius Areopagita," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 24 (1977): 165-186.

[97] CH 2 140A 2-4.

[98] φυσικοῖς καὶ ἀνθρωποπρεπέσιν ἐσόπτροις, EH 2 397A 10.

6

Biblical Absurdities

From Philo of Alexandria to the Pseudo-Areopagite and beyond, many Judeo-Christian thinkers have claimed an implicit meaning below the surface of the scriptures. As Hellenists allegorized Homer's gods,[1] so certain patristic theologians found hidden spiritual meanings in the most physical and anthropomorphic of biblical passages. In our author's spatial idiom of descent, the divine proceeds not only down to the lowly human level of understanding, namely, to the spatial and temporal plurality of the physical senses, but to a level more lowly still. Divine truths are expressed in the Areopagite's Bible by even the lowest and most incongruous comparisons of the earthly with the heavenly. The need to deny the superficial sense of such symbols while simultaneously finding and affirming their deeper meanings requires a delicate balance of negative and positive components within the Dionysian interpretive method. Unlike the general procession into plurality, as discussed above regarding both the scriptures and the liturgy, the deeper descent into obvious incongruity concerns only the biblical domain. Since the second chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy* directly addresses the topic of incongruous biblical symbols, the sequence of its argument will be our guide in this chapter.[2]

[1] F. Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956). J. Pépin, *Mythe et Allégorie* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1958). J. Tate, "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation," *Classical Quarterly* 23 (1929): 142-154, 24 (1930): 1-10. J. Tate, "On the History of Allegory," *Classical Quarterly* 28 (1934): 105-115.

[2] The early attempt by G. Horn to consider the Areopagite's hermeneutical method was little more than a collection of quotations from this chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, with scant interpretation and no mention of the rest of the corpus. "Comment Denys le ps. Aréopagite interprète l'écriture," *Recherches des Sciences Religieuses* 20 (1930): 45-48.

A. The Scriptural Depictions of the Angels

The Areopagite's explanation of the unseemly scriptural portrayals of heavenly beings unfolds with great care. Like a patient teacher introducing a complicated topic, he first ponders with the reader the various options one could take when presented with such passages. Surely we should not go along with the crowd, he counsels, in thinking that the heavenly beings actually have feet and faces, that they really are stupid oxen or ferocious lions. Rather, such depictions are poetic representations provided to us for a purpose.[3] Also unacceptable, therefore, is the second option, that of denigrating the lower comparisons and preferring the more "honorable." Dennis takes this alternative more seriously than the first and gives it a fuller consideration. Now one might think, he concedes for the sake of persuasion, that the scriptural descriptions of the angels are incongruous, that each one is an inadequate sham.[4] This is actually a challenge to the scripture writers: when they came to the bodily representation of the bodiless, they should have used more appropriate forms.[5] It would have been better, concludes this second argument, if they had taken comparisons from the more honorable beings, from those which are immaterial and in some way superior, "instead of drawing upon a multiplicity of the earthiest forms." [6] After presenting this second option, our author and teacher gently affirms its intentions before correcting its error. "Now perhaps this intends to lift us upward and not lead the celestial appearances down into incongruous dissimilarities." [7] Nevertheless it errs in denigrating the divine power to use even the incongruous for its purposes and in diverting us back to the first mistaken option of dwelling on some passages as literally true.[8] If you think that certain depictions are more or less accurate, continues the now sharper correction, you will eventually conclude that the heavens really are full of lions, horses, mooed hymns, and other "dissimilar similarities." [9]

At this point begins the author's own "investigation of the truth" beyond the two rejected alternatives, a solution which neither mires one in the base depths of the symbols' literal meanings, nor wrongs the divine

[3] CH 2 137A 2-15. The statement of "accommodating provision" which occurs at this point (CH 2 137B 15-21) has been quoted in chapter five (n. 95).

[4] CH 2 137B 21-26.

[5] CH 2 137C 26-29.

[6] CH 2 137C 31-33.

[7] CH 2 137C 33-36.

[8] CH 2 137C 36-38.

[9] *ἀνόμοιοι ... ὁμοιότητες* CH 2 137C 38 to 140A 1.

power and provisions in the scriptures.[10] The argument begins with the two reasons why shapes are proposed for the shapeless at all: accommodation and secrecy.[11] After this broad rationale for the general procession into plurality, the Pseudo-Areopagite approaches the more specific question of the further descent even down to absurd comparisons:

> As for the incongruity of scriptural imagery or the impropriety of using humble forms to represent the divine and holy ranks, this is a criticism to which one must say in reply that sacred revelation works in a double way.[12]

First of all, the term "way" (τρόπος) is generally a casual expression for our author, meaning simply "manner" or "mode" in various non-technical contexts.[13] While the word can also carry the more specific meaning of "a way of speaking," [14] it does not have the fully technical sense of a "trope" or a figure of speech. Nor is the Areopagite introducing two separate "ways" of revelation, as it may seem, but one double way, a mode of revelation which has two inseparable aspects.

> It does so, firstly, by proceeding naturally through sacred images, in which like represents like, while also using formations which are dissimilar and even entirely inadequate and ridiculous.[15]

In providing examples to clarify this duality, Pseudo-Dionysius suddenly reveals that not just the descriptions of angels but indeed all biblical language about the thearchy itself is at stake here. The scriptures use similar images, for example, when they praise the thearchy "as word or mind or being, showing thereby that rationality and wisdom are attributes of God." [16] Such descriptions may seem more noble and superior to the base material forms; nevertheless, they too are dissimilar, for even they

[10] CH 2 140A 1-7.

[11] CH 2 140AB 7-20, quoted in chapter five (n. 84).

[12] CH 2 140B 20-24. The word δίττος recalls the double tradition of the scriptures in Ep. 9 1105D. But biblical passages were there divided into didactic and symbolic (see chapter four, n. 6), while here the symbols themselves are identified as similar and dissimilar.

[13] Such general uses as "in no way," "in this way," "in every way," appear in CH 3 165C 32, CH 8 237C 14, EH 2 397A 3, EH 3 429A 15, EH 4 473A 2, 477B 20, EH 5 509B 13 and 17, EH 6 533D 44, 536C 27, and DN 4 720B 25.

[14] CH 2 141C 38, 141D 42, CH 8 240B 23, CH 15 328A 15, DN 2 645D 47, DN 7 865C 21, DN 11 956B 19, and Ep. 9 1112D 41.

[15] CH 2 140C 25-28. With the expression *ὁ μὲν ... διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων προϊὼν ἱεροτύπων εἰκόνων*, the author hints at a "cataphatic" procession and its (simultaneous) counterpart, the "apophatic" return (*τὴν διὰ τῶν ἀποφάσεων ἄνοδον*, DN 13 981B 16f.), although this full structure is not yet in view.

[16] CH 2 140C 28-34.

fall short of a true likeness to the divinity which is completely beyond every word and mind and being.[17]

The role of negations becomes explicit when Dionysius turns to the second aspect of the sacred manifestation:

> Then there is the scriptural device of praising the deity by presenting it in utterly dissimilar revelations. He is described as invisible, infinite, ungraspable, and other things which show not what He is but what He is not.[18]

By invoking the principle of negative theology to explain incongruous biblical descriptions,[19] this extremely condensed argument does not quite equate dissimilarities with negations but juxtaposes them as closely related.

> Since the way of negation appears to be more suitable to the realm of the divine and since positive affirmations are always unfitting to the hiddenness of the inexpressible, a manifestation through dissimilar shapes is more correctly to be applied to the invisible.[20]

Although our enigmatic author then simply applies to the biblical descriptions of angels this principle of the superiority of dissimilarities, and thus continues his argument without elaboration, the reader must first pause and refer to *The Mystical Theology* in order to grasp the relationship between negations and dissimilar representations and to glimpse their shared place in the larger framework of affirmation and negation, of procession and return.

B. The Context of Negative Theology

In *The Mystical Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius sketched the overall framework of his corpus and provided a guide to its ultimate purpose: to go beyond the perceptible to the intelligible, and then to abandon even this "noetic" realm in the final, silent approach to the ineffable. Since the divine is both the cause of all things, and yet also beyond them all, any assertions taken from earthly things as effects can be affirmed about God who is their cause; yet these statements can and indeed should be denied about God who transcends them all.[21] The countless possible affirmations

[17] CH 2 140CD 38-41. The divinity is even beyond the name "good" (DN 13 980D 43 to 981B 22, cf. DN 9 913C 29 to 916A 2).

[18] CH 2 140D 41-45.

[19] CH 2 140D 45 to 141A 3.

[20] CH 2 141A 3-7.

[21] MT 1 1000B 14-20.

and negations are not made at random, however, but are arranged into a very specific pattern of internal sequence. Affirmative theology, to summarize what has been discussed above, proceeds from the first and few affirmations nearest God's own ineffable simplicity down to the last and many assertions of variegated symbols for the deity. Conversely, the negations begin with these last things and become fewer and less verbal as they ascend toward the speechless.[22]

> Now you may wonder why it is that, after starting out from the highest category when our method involved assertions, we begin now from the lowest category when it involves a denial. The reason is this. When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must then proceed from what is most akin to It, and as we do so we make the affirmation on which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most from the goal we hope to attain.[23]

The examples intended to clarify this principle are as cryptic as they are crucial: is it not more true to assert that God is life or goodness than that he is a breeze or a stone? [24] Affirmations begin with the former, more similar comparisons, and then proceed down to the latter, less appropriate ones. From the other point of view, is it not more inappropriate to say that God gets drunk or raves than that he is expressed or conceived? [25] Negations begin with the former, most dissimilar depictions and then ascend to the latter, more accurate ones. Therefore, not all affirmations are equally inappropriate and not all negations are equally appropriate.

The Areopagite's use of affirmation and negation is not an abstract principle in which all affirmations are indiscriminately false and all negations are simply true. First of all, the subject matter of this discussion in *The Mystical Theology* is exclusively supplied by the scriptures.[26] Dionysius continues to use the term "theology" to mean "the word of God." Since the Areopagite's "theological" method is actually his biblical hermeneutics, the primary context of "negative theology" is the

[22] MT 2 1025B 13-23, cf. MT 3 1032D to 1033C.

[23] MT 3 1033C 36-43.

[24] *ἢ οὐχὶ μᾶλλόν ἐστι ζωὴ καὶ ἀγαθότης ἢ ἀὴρ καὶ λίθος*, MT 3 1033C 43f.

[25] *καὶ μάλλον οὐ κραιπαλᾷ καὶ οὐ μηνιᾷ ἢ οὐ λέγεται οὐδὲ νοεῖται*, MT 3 1033C 44f.

[26] For "breeze," which is mentioned more clearly in DN 1 596B 25f. and DN 9 909B 15f., see 1 Kgs. 19.12 (Septuagint). For "stone," also mentioned in CH 2 144D 45f., DN 1 596C 30f., and Ep. 9 1105A 11, see Ps. 118.22 (cited in Mt. 21.42, Mk. 12.10, Acts 4.11, and 1 Pet. 2.4 and 7), Is. 8.14 (cited in Rom. 9.33 and 1 Pet. 2.8), and Is. 28.16 (cited in Rom. 9.33, Eph. 2.20, and 1 Pet. 2.4 and 6). For God's "drunkenness" or "hang-over," also mentioned in MT 3 1033B 19, Ep. 9 1105B 18, and 1113C 27, see Ps. 78.65.

interpretation of scripture. Futhermore, the picture of a continuum of descending affirmations arranged in a relative order and their mirror image in a continuum of ascending negations suggests that affirmation and negation are not independent of each other but rather are two ways of viewing the very same thing. A given biblical statement about God or about the angels is carefully weighed in order to determine in what sense it is true and can thus be affirmed, and in what sense it is false and should be denied. These statements are not automatically and indiscriminately negated; they are evaluated in order to leave behind what is superficially claimed but is on that level false, and in order to ascend toward what is really meant and can thus be affirmed on a new, higher plane. In such evaluation, affirmation and negation *combine* to yield an intelligible interpretation which transcends the symbols' initial level of sense perception. The conceptions gained in this process of biblical hermeneutics will themselves be negated eventually, not in yet another interpretation but in an abandonment entirely in the silent approach to that which is ultimately transcendent.

Thus *The Mystical Theology* summarizes the notion of procession and anticipates the following discussion of the return. On the one hand, the spatial metaphor of descent and ascent is helpful in comprehending this system of inter-related affirmations and negations. We have seen the author's own portrayal of affirmative theology as a descent; its counterpart, "an ascent through negations," [27] will receive more sustained attention shortly. On the other hand, there is a serious danger in this imagery, not in its literal spatial sense which, like any transparently incongruous comparison, will mislead no one,[28] but rather in its more subtly misleading suggestion of a temporal sequence. The Pseudo-Dionysian method is not simply a series of affirmations followed by their negation in reverse order. In such an over-simplification, one is either descending or ascending, either affirming or denying, and a symbol for God is either similar or dissimilar. Rather, just as procession and return in Neoplatonic metaphysics are not sequential moments, so affirmation and negation in Pseudo-Dionysius are not mutually exclusive options to be exercised separately. Neoplatonic studies grapple with the ambiguity inherent in using the language of a temporal sequence, of a "motion," to express a timeless dynamic in the motionless realm of the divine and the intelligible.[29] The motif is often interpreted in terms of logic, i.e., that

[27] DN 13 981B 16f.; cf. MT 2 1025B 17f., MT 3 1033B 26f., 1033C 33-35, MT 5 1045D 4.

[28] Ep. 8 1092B 18f.

[29] See especially the work of Stephen Gersh, whose first book on the subject is

procession and return are two contemporaneous aspects of the relation of an effect to its cause, as proceeding from it and as reverting to it. In ontological terms, this language provides two metaphors for viewing the transcendent one with respect to the contingent many, as their source and as their goal.

In any case, the Areopagite carefully preserved the simultaneity of procession and return, and thus of affirmation and negation. A given expression or symbol about God is denied because of its ultimate dissimilarity, but it is also, and at the same time, affirmed because of its relative similarity. An assertion based upon sense perception might claim, for example, "God is big." The interpretation of that symbolic language would counter with a negation, "Well, God is not really 'big' in that spatial sense," and then continue with an explanatory affirmation on a higher level, "God is 'big' in another way, a way not dependent upon perceptible categories" or, to use Dionysian short-hand, "God is super-big or more-than-big," employing the familiar sign of the superlative, ὑπερ-. While these themes are presented with very little concrete application in *The Mystical Theology*, they are put to work in the second chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy*.[30] Furthermore, the simultaneous nature of affirmation and negation is only implied in the former work, perhaps because that slight essay bears the burden and tension of presenting not only the author's method, for which this simultaneity is essential, but also the order of his treatises, for which a temporal sequence is inescapable. While this sequence of treatises can be discerned only after the nature of the "return" has been addressed more directly, we can now return to *The Celestial Hierarchy* where the complementarity of affirmative and negative "theology" is tersely but unmistakably summarized in the seeming oxymoron "dissimilar similarities." [31]

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entitled, in Greek, "unmoving motion": Κινήσις ἀκινήτος; see also *From Iamblichus*, pp. 287f.

[30] It is at this point that Vanneste's separation of *The Mystical Theology* from the hierarchical treatises is least persuasive (*Le Mystère de Dieu*, pp. 30-36; "La théologie mystique," pp. 408-411). R. Roques had already suggested their close relationship, "La théologie négative apparaît ainsi comme le centre et la clé de tout symbolisme," *Structures*, p. 172. Vanneste apparently never consulted this essay, which first appeared as "Symbolisme et théologie négative chez le pseudo-Denys," *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume-Budé* 1 (1957): 97-112. See also Roques, *La Hiérarchie Céleste* (SC 58), pp. xxvi-xxvii. Roques' bond between negative theology and symbols is affirmed by E. des Places, "La théologie négative du Pseudo-Denys," *Studia Patristica* vol. 17 (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), pp. 81-92. On the sequence of treatises, see chapter eight below.

[31] ἀνόμοιοι ὁμοιότητες, CH 2 137D 44 to 140A 1, 141C 37, 144A 5, 145A 14, CH 15 337B 25, EH 1 377B 25.

C. The Interpretation of Incongruities

After invoking the entire framework of affirmative and negative theology to argue that dissimilar representations are indeed appropriate, the Pseudo-Areopagite continues the argument of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter two. Because they reveal the transcendence of the angels, the incongruous do not shame but rather honor the celestial beings.[32] To explain this further, our pedagogical author again employs the familiar spatial imagery and then provides some instructive examples. "Incongruities are more suitable for lifting our minds up than similarities are." [33] One could easily be seduced, he concedes, by the more honorable comparisons, thinking that the angels really are golden and luminous men in dazzling, fiery raiment.

> It was to avoid this kind of misunderstanding among those incapable of rising above visible beauty that the pious theologians so wisely and upliftingly stooped to incongruous dissimilarities, for by doing this they took account of our inherent tendency towards the material and our willingness to be lazily satisfied by base images. At the same time they enabled that part of the soul which longs for the things above actually to rise up. Indeed the sheer crassness of the signs is a goad so that even the materially inclined cannot accept that it could be permitted or true that the celestial and divine sights could be conveyed by such shameful things.[34]

Not only are the obvious incongruities preferable, in that they goad the reader to seek a higher meaning, but they are also metaphysically justifiable, since all things do participate in the good.[35]

Dennis now introduces his examples. One can form for the angels "dissimilar similarities" or "unlike likenesses" from even material things

[32] CH 2 141A 7-11.

[33] CH 2 141A 11-14.

[34] CH 2 141B 21-31. See the metaphysical expression of this descent, with *κατάγεται*, in DN 4 712B 17-20. At this point we recall Origen and the scriptural "stumbling blocks" which keep "us" from being drawn away by attractive language and from missing the higher meaning, *σκάνδαλα καὶ προσκόμματα καὶ ἀδύνατα*, *de Princ.*, Book Four, 2.9 (321.6f.), ed. Görgemans and Karpp (Darmstadt, 1976). But the similarity of a passage from Proclus is even more striking: "It seems to me that the grim, monstrous, and unnatural character of poetic fictions moves the listener in every way to a search for truth, and draws him toward the secret knowledge; it does not allow him, as would be the case with something that possessed a surface probability, to remain with the thoughts placed before him. It compels him, instead, to enter into the interior of the myths ..." *In Rempublicam*, 1: 85.16-86.23; Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm*, p. 57, cf. p. 50. Proclus gives his examples in *In Rempublicam*, 1: 82.2-83.10; Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm*, pp. 53-54, 136.

[35] CH 2 141C 31-34. See above, chapter five, notes 68f. Even matter echoes the intelligible beauty: CH 2 144B 23-28.

because "the intelligible beings possess in one way that which is attributed to perceptible things in quite another way." [36] Anger, for example, is an unreasonable emotion but it can be applied to the celestial beings when understood "in another way." [37] In the realm of sense perception, desire is a bodily longing; but "when we apply dissimilar similarities to the intelligent beings," desire should be understood in another way, namely as a divine love of the immaterial.[38] At this point the argument has not shifted ground, as it may seem, but has received its first full expression. The double "way" of manifesting the deity does *not* pose two mutually exclusive alternatives: a way of similarities to be affirmed or a way of dissimilarities to be negated. In the examples provided, a given depiction can be, depending upon the way it is applied, both like and also unlike the angels, and thus an "unlike likeness." The very same characteristic is in one way a similarity to be affirmed and in another way a dissimilarity to be negated. The way in which a given attribute is appropriate in the context of sense perception, and thus a similarity there, is not the way in which that attribute can be applied to the angelic realm beyond the senses. When applied to the angels in that first way, such an attribute becomes a dissimilarity. But "in another way," i.e. as transferred from the senses to the intelligible realm, this same attribute can again be applied to the angels, this time as a similarity in a new way. Thus these characteristics are not simply denied as if the angels were deficient or deprived of what the lower beings have, but are rather interpreted in a way which transcends the lower realm's inadequate categories.[39]

> But when we are talking of immaterial and intelligent beings we say this, as befits holy beings. They, as transcendent beings, far surpass our discursive and bodily reason, just as material perception is something far beneath those entities which are intelligent and disembodied.[40]

The Areopagite closes this section by repeating the metaphysical possibility of such similarities,[41] and their spiritual desirability as long as they are interpreted "dissimilarly." They are appropriate to both the realm of sense perception and also that of the intelligence, but in different ways.[42] It is the pedagogical advantage of the truly incongruous that such interpretation is so obviously required.

[36] CH 2 141C 35-39.
[37] CH 2 141D 39-45.
[38] CH 2 141D 45 to 144A 12; the third example is incontinence, 144A 12-16.
[39] CH 2 144B 16-19.
[40] CH 2 144B 19-23.
[41] CH 2 144B 23-28, see n. 35 above.
[42] CH 2 144BC 28-33. The parallels with Proclus are better known (note 34 above and

This approach to the biblical angels is then applied to the incongruous scriptural depictions of God.[43] The scripture writers sometimes praise God with what appear to be the most honorable symbols, such as the "sun of righteousness," and sometimes "from the middle ones" such as a benignly illuminating fire.[44] They even stoop to using material things like myron or a cornerstone.[45] Furthermore, the Bible can attribute to God the bestial characteristics of a lion or a bear,[46] and even, to add what seems yet more dishonorable and incongruous, the form of a worm.[47] Unlike the previous illustrations of angelic attributes, these examples are not actually interpreted or even discussed here. The readers are left to their own resources in applying the previous discussion of similarity and dissimilarity, including the role of negations. Here there is no division between mutually exclusive alternatives of similar or dissimilar images to be affirmed or denied. The examples are instead carefully arranged in a single continuum from what appears most honorable down to what seems most dishonorable. These symbols invite not simply affirmation or negation but rather a careful interpretation which itself contains affirmative and negative components. The reader is expected to remember that even the loftiest similarity is ultimately dissimilar to the thearchy and, conversely, that even the lowliest dissimilarity is also similar to it in some way. Thus all along the continuum each depiction is simultaneously similar and dissimilar to God, varying only in degree. The most explicit statement of this simultaneity is found in *The Divine Names*.

> For the very same things are both similar and dissimilar to God. They are similar to Him to the extent that they share what cannot be shared. They are dissimilar to Him in that as effects they fall so very far short of their Cause and are infinitely and incomparably subordinate to Him.[48]

Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, pp. 199-205), but certain parallels with Iamblichus should also be pointed out. "One should not understand acts performed both toward the gods and toward humans (such as prostrations, obeisances, gifts, and offerings) in the same way but should take them separately according to the difference regarding the more honorable." Iamblichus, *de Mysteriis*, 1.21, 66.5-9. See below, chapter seven, n. 51.

[43] CH 2 144C 34-37.

[44] CH 2 144CD 37-46. "Sun of righteousness" is taken from Mal. 4.2; the image of fire taken from Ex. 3.2 is also discussed more broadly in CH 15 328C 36 to 329C 38, and Ep. 9 1108CD.

[45] CH 2 144D 44-46. The image of ointment or myron is used in Song of Solomon 1.3 and also discussed in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, chapter four; that of the cornerstone is in Is. 28.16 and Eph. 2.20.

[46] CH 2 144D 45 to 145A 1; Is. 31.4, Hos. 5.14 and 13.7f.

[47] CH 2 145A 1-4; Ps. 22.6.

[48] *τὰ γὰρ αὐτὰ καὶ ὅμοια θεῷ καὶ ἀνόμοια* DN 9 916A 8-12. The Göttingen text will read *τοῦ ἀμεθέκτου μέθεξιν* instead of *τοῦ ἀμιμήτου μίμησιν*.

Determining in what way depictions from the lower realms are similar to the higher beings, even as they are all inevitably dissimilar and deficient, is the process of biblical interpretation. This process carries within itself the principle of negation and can apply it without repeated explanation.

In concluding this methodological chapter, Dionysius repeats that with such imagery the scriptures both guard divine things from the profane, and also, in a descent below mere accommodation, prevent us from "dwelling on the types as true." [49] Thus, "true negations, ... unlike comparisons, ... and incongruous dissimilar similarities" are all wisely employed by the scriptures.[50] The condensed juxtaposition of these expressions without further clarification, especially of their interrelationships, accentuates the complexity of this subject matter. Yet as a whole, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter two, exhibits certain characteristics of a pedagogical introduction: the consideration of a misguided alternative, affirming its intentions and then reducing it to the absurdity of mooed angelic hymns and a vermicular deity, the frequent examples, and the periodic repetitions of the key points. To confirm this impression, the chapter's final summary is a teacher's personal testimony, self-consciously instructive, and perhaps unintentionally and genuinely autobiographical.

> And I myself might not have been stirred from this difficulty to my current inquiry, to an uplifting through a precise explanation of these sacred truths had I not been troubled by the deformed imagery used by scripture in regard to the angels. My mind was not permitted to dwell on imagery so inadequate, but was provoked to get behind the material show, to get accustomed to the idea of going beyond appearances to those upliftings which are not of this world.[51]

This passage is extremely suggestive. The chapter's pedagogical overtones, as confirmed by this testimony, indicate the fundamental reason why dissimilar similarities are preferable to those which are more flattering or at least reasonable. The clear necessity to find spiritual interpretations for absurd comparisons is an instructional aid when one begins to search the scriptures. Once begun, the interpretive method of negating and transcending the surface meanings can ascend to the more becoming depictions and yet not succumb to their exterior charms. At this higher level, the experienced interpreter needs no further reminders of the role of negative theology, namely, of the need to transcend appearances. After

[49] CH 2 145A 4-10.
[50] CH 2 145A 10-15.
[51] CH 2 145B 15-23; on this use of the term "uplifting," see chapter seven, notes 71-75.

their thorough introduction, certain principles of interpretation can be assumed. This helps explain why the theory of incongruity and negative theology is not explicitly discussed in the author's own exegesis in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter fifteen. The specific descriptions of the angels interpreted in that chapter were presented above, in the current chapter five. Seemingly absent, however, is the principle of negation previously incorporated into the author's interpretive methodology.

But the opening lines of chapter fifteen help dispel the charge that Pseudo-Dionysius neglected his own hermeneutical framework when it came to concrete exegesis. He begins with a unique application of the larger framework of divine "procession and return" to the specific tasks of the exegete.

> So now, if you will, the eye of our intelligence is going to relax the effort by which it tries to reach the solitary heights of contemplation befitting the angels. We must come down to the plains of distinction and multiplicity, to the many variegated forms and shapes adopted by the angels. Then, once more, we will take off from these images, and will, by retracing, rise up again to the simplicity of the heavenly minds.[52]

In particular, the concept of dissimilarity is not neglected in this exegetical chapter, but is rather assumed. As an exegete, Dionysius assures the reader that he would apply all the bodily shapes to the angelic powers, "in terms of dissimilar similarities." [53] All of the images interpreted in this chapter are both similar and dissimilar to the angels; their interpretations follow the model examples in the second chapter of the treatise. Once introduced, the notion of incongruity, which contains negative theology within itself, is an assumed and natural part of the interpretive process and needs few illustrations. "Not only do these [examples] suffice to the wise, but the explanation of one incongruous image suffices for the like-mannered interpretation of comparable ones." [54]

If the role of negations in the interpretation of symbols is made explicit only in the early, methodological introduction of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, and is largely assumed thereafter, and if this supposition helps illuminate the final chapter of that treatise, then perhaps the next tract, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, should also be seen in this light. Not only are liturgical images and symbols never called incongruous or dissimilar,

[52] CH 15 328A 1-7. This passage is unique in that it is the exegete who "descends" and "ascends."

[53] CH 15 337B 21-25.

[54] CH 15 337C 31-34. An "explanation" is here a "clearing-up" (ἀνακάθαρσις); cf. CH 15 328A 8, 328C 37, 336A 4, 336C 34, 337D 47.

a silence striking by itself, but they are explicitly considered "precise" and ascribed "with appropriateness." [55] Either the Areopagite does not apply to the liturgy his firm principles that even the loftiest images are insufficient and need interpretation including negation, or else that principle is at this point so assumed that it is never mentioned. Since the two treatises stand in sequence, the example of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter fifteen, in taking negative theology almost for granted would suggest, for the moment, that the role of negations in interpretation is also assumed in the subsequent work, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. When the "uplifting" nature of biblical and liturgical interpretation has been considered more thoroughly, we shall return to the question of their interrelationship.

Finally, the preceding survey of the divine procession even down to absurd incongruities has required the occasional mention of its inseparable counterpart, the return "upward." The Areopagite testifies to being "sacredly raised up by means of the appearances" and even calls the investigation of the scriptures an "uplifting." [56] The lowest point of the divine procession into dissimilarity reveals most forcefully that its essential purpose is to provoke a movement in the opposite direction.

[55] EH 2 401C 35f., 404B 12f.
[56] CH 2 145B 17 and 22f.

Part Three
The Upward Return

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7

The Anagogical Movement

At the lowest point of its procession into perceptible plurality, the divine movement reverses direction and ascends or returns toward its source, uplifting with itself those who have beheld this descent into sense perception. The following consideration of this "uplifting" movement will have three objectives. It begins by examining the Areopagite's terms for the "return" (ἐπιστροφή) and for the "uplifting" (ἀναγωγή), in order to evaluate their relationship. Secondly, it will follow the sequence of the "upward" movement from its starting point through certain inner dynamics to the goal or endpoint. Thirdly, this chapter will be concerned throughout to show that the uplifting or "anagogical" dimensions of the author's biblical hermeneutics and those of his liturgical interpretation are basically identical. Discussion of their single and crucial difference is then taken up in chapter eight.

A. To "Return" is to be "Uplifted" Through Symbols

Although the principal, almost technical Greek expression for "return" in late Neoplatonism was ἐπιστροφή, Dionysius presented the same general concept with a considerable variety of terms.[1] In particular, his many uses of "uplift" (ἀνάγω) and its cognates constitute a dynamic which is clearly similar, both in the superficial meaning of a spatial movement and also in the deeper sense of a spiritual process. Because the significance of this similarity has not been fully appreciated and is yet crucial to a comprehensive interpretation of the Dionysian corpus, a direct examination of these terms is essential. The two word families can be juxtaposed as adjectives, "the uplifting and returning providence ...," [2] and as nouns,

[1] A "wide range of equivalents" observes S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 46.

[2] ἀναγώγου καὶ ἐπιστρεπτικῆς ... CH 15 333B 24.

"the uplifting and return toward God."[3] One passage juxtaposes the "return" with yet another formulation of the upward movement:

> Every being endowed with intelligence and reason, which, totally and as far as it can, is returned to be united with Him, which is forever being raised up towards His divine enlightenments ....[4]

The Areopagite's terminological flexibility includes several other options such as "ascent," used to characterize Moses' "divine ascents" up Mount Sinai,[5] and the expression "to look upward," particularly regarding the scriptures and occasionally with overtones of a spiritual elevation.[6]

The expression quoted above, "the uplifting and return toward God," is indicative of a larger pattern: the two terms indicate one and the same movement insofar as there is but one goal, God.[7] The author's various synonyms for God, such as the divine, the source, the cause, or the one, are applied equally to the "revertive" and the "anagogical" expressions of this one elevation. Those "being returned to God" *are* "those being raised up to God."[8] The return to the divine is the same movement as the

[3] *ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ἀναγωγὴ καὶ ἐπιστροφή* ... CH 9 260B 16f. In yet another passage the two receive a parallel construction as participles: "being lifted up powerfully" and "being returned powerfully" (CH 8 240A 2-8).

[4] *ἐπέστραπται ... ἀνατείνεται*, CH 12 293B 19-22. See also CH 1 121B 21f.

[5] *τῶν θείων ἀναβάσεων*, MT 1 1000D 41; EH 2 397C 28, DN 5 821B 16f., DN 11 949C 44.

[6] In general: CH 1 121B 21f., Ep. 8 1085C 34, 1096C 39, 1100C 33. Regarding the scriptures: CH 1 121A 6-8, CH 4 181C 28, DN 1 588A 8, DN 2 640A 13f. Spiritual: MT 3 1033B 26.

On the model of *ἀνάγω* several related verbs will also be included in this investigation: *προσάγω* EH 5 501D 50 and DN 2 645A 5; *χειραγωγέω* EH 2 396D 39, EH 3 437B 21f., EH 5 505D 41, EH 7 556A 9, Ep. 8 1096C 37, Ep. 9 1108B 20, 1112A 11; *χειραγωγία* CH 1 121D 40, CH 9 261C 35, CH 13 304C 24, EH 2 397C 33, DN 1 589C 28, DN 2 640A 6; *φωταγωγέω* DN 1 589B 15, Ep. 8 1085C 44.

Further expressions of the same dynamic: *ἀποκαθίστημι* (I return, am restored) is linked with *πρόοδος* and *μόνη* in DN 4 713A 1f., and characterizes the hierarch's return to the altar after the incense procession in EH 3 429A 1, and his return to his own *ἀρχή* in EH 3 429B 20; *ἀνακάμπτω* (I return) in CH 15 328A 7 regarding biblical exegesis; "*ἄνοδος* through negations" in DN 13 981B 16f. and MT 3 1033C 34f.; *ἀνακινέω* (I move up) in DN 4 708D 49; etc.

[7] This is in clear contrast with Proclus, who distinguished "return" from "uplifting": "Every uplifting cause among the gods differs from both the purifying and the returning kinds .... It has a more specific order than the returning kind, for that which returns returns either to itself or to something higher, while the effect of an uplifting cause is characterized by the return toward the higher, as lifting up to the more divine that which is being returned" (*Elements*, no. 158, p. 138). For the Areopagite, there is no such alternative within *ἐπιστροφή*; there is only one cause, and *every* return is toward the higher, toward God. There is therefore no such distinction between "return" and "uplifting."

[8] CH 8 240C 35 and CH 15 340A 12f.; cf. CH 7 208D 46, EH 2 400C 36f., EH 5 504C 26, DN 9 913C 32, 916D 43f., and Ep. 9 1108A 14f.

uplifting to the divine.[9] The angels are both returned and uplifted toward God, the source beyond being.[10]

Yet even as we survey the ways that Dionysius expresses the single, divine goal of the return and the uplifting, a difference between these word families also begins to emerge. While both indicate a movement toward the divine cause, a statement of the "returning" motion mentions no agency in this ascent[11] whereas the use of "uplift" is accompanied by a fuller account: "that we might be uplifted through the proportionate knowledge of these things to the cause of all things." [12] This uplifting takes place by means of knowledge, an epistemological dimension to be discussed below. For the moment we note only that "return" and "uplifting" are identical except that when the latter term and its derivatives are used, the author also supplies a more specific picture of the upward motion.

The goal of this movement can also be described as union with the divine, and here too the language of "return" provides less detail. The return to the divine is "toward its union," [13] while Timothy is advised to "strive upward as much as you can toward union with Him who is beyond all being and beyond all knowledge." [14] This elevation toward union with the divine is itself unifying; as a movement from plurality "up" to unity, it is the counterpart of the procession "down" into plurality discussed above. "All things desire it because it returns their divided plurality into a whole oneness and it unifies ...." [15] The basic movement from plurality to oneness is also presented in the opening lines of *The Celestial Hierarchy*; the goal toward which the unifying power of the divine procession "upwardly stirs and returns us" is "a oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in." [16] This simplicity is also the goal when the language of "uplifting" is employed, yet with a difference. In the passage discussed at length in chapter four, the goal is

[9] *τὴν ... πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἐπιστροφήν*, EH 4 477D 45. For *ἀνάγω*, see CH 4 180B 22, 180C 37f., 181A 3f., CH 7 208B 30f., CH 8 240B 15, CH 9 260C 31, EH 5 501D 45f. Related goals: imitation of God (CH 3 164D 39f., 165B 24, CH 8 240A 2f.), godlikeness (CH 13 304D 43, EH 3 433C 30f., EH 6 536A 9f.), and deification (EH 1 373A 12f., 376D 41, EH 3 433C 31f.).

[10] CH 9 257C 26f. and CH 8 240C 39f.; cf. CH 8 241C 43, CH 10 273A 4f., DN 4 696C 32, CH 9 261D 48ff.

[11] DN 9 913C 35.

[12] DN 5 825A 2-4; cf. Ep. 7 1080B 21-23, and, regarding "cause" as the goal, DN 4 713C 30 and DN 5 821B 17.

[13] *πρὸς τὴν ἕνωσιν αὐτῆς* CH 12 293B 19f.

[14] MT 1 997B 16-22.

[15] DN 11 948D 8 to 949A 1; cf. CH 1 121B 22.

[16] CH 1 120B 8 to 121A 1; cf. DN 4 705A 7.

not the supreme simplicity of the "father" but a lesser, perhaps provisional goal, the simplicity of the angels: "so that we may be uplifted by way of these mysterious representations to their divine simplicity." [17] This statement is more epistemological than metaphysical. It supplies what the references to a "return" generally lack,[18] a clear statement of the movement's means or agency, namely, "by means of the representations."

Thus "return" and "uplifting" are one and the same ascent toward an identical goal. When expressed in terms of "return" this elevating movement receives a stark metaphysical expression, such as "from the many to the one," or "toward that which truly is." [19] The philosophical statements that the good (or light, the cause of all, or the pantocrator) [20] returns all things to itself contain no further explanation of *how* this movement takes place.[21] When the terminology of "uplift" is used, this same ascending movement is described in more detail and is tied to the interpretation of symbols. The author's general statements of the "return" are specified by his epistemologically more concrete explanations of an uplifting through the angels' scriptural representations to their most divine simplicity, or through the sequential parts of the sacrament of myron to its oneness. These examples call our attention back to the "anagogical" methodology in the Areopagite's biblical hermeneutics and sacramental theology. Yet it should now be apparent that this "anagogy" is not an independent interest of our author unrelated to his project's philosophical structure. A thorough investigation of the "return" side of the Pseudo-Dionysian conceptual framework leads directly to two areas generally neglected by modern readers, biblical hermeneutics and liturgical theology.[22] For it is in the occurrences of the language of "uplifting" that the intermediate steps and specific method of the upward process are spelled out.

> Only gradually will the catechumen be uplifted to a higher state, because of the mediation of people more advanced than he. Helped on by those at a

[17] CH 4 177C 7f.; see also *πρὸς ποίαν χρὴ ἀναχθῆναι διὰ τῶν πλασμάτων ἁπλότητα*, CH 2 137A 2f.; CH 1 121C 34, CH 15 328A 6, DN 1 592C 42, DN 4 705B 20.

[18] Except perhaps DN 9 913C 31f., and DN 13 980C 33f.

[19] *ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ἕν* DN 13 980C 32f., cf. EH 4 440A 6f., DN 4 705A 6f., DN 11 948D 9f.; *πρὸς τὸ ὄντως ὂν* DN 4 701B 20, cf. CH 8 237C 22.

[20] DN 4 700B 24f., 708B 16, DN 10 937A 1f.

[21] DN 4 700A 10; cf. DN 4 700B 17f., 705D 42f., 712C 42f.

[22] This is also true of Stephen Gersh who surveys the "return" but neglects "uplifting." He is thus led to remark, regarding DN 4 705A, that Pseudo-Dionysius "does not give any further details of the type of cognitive activity visualized here" (*From Iamblichus*, p. 276).

> higher level, as far as the very first ranks, following the sacred rules of order he will be uplifted to the summit where the Deity is.[23]

The uplifting function of scriptural and liturgical symbols may now receive a more systematic consideration. The moving force or active subject of this uplifting is always God, whether expressed in one of the Pseudo-Areopagite's many synonyms for the divine or in the hierarchical principle that even the activity of a lower being depends upon a superior being, and ultimately upon the divine source. In grammatical form and actual content, the Pseudo-Dionysian expressions of this upward motion, whether in biblical or liturgical contexts, consistently present God or a divine intermediary as the active subject, while the lower ranks, especially the human, are those who are "uplifted." [24] Thus the various hierarchical ranks are frequently said to uplift a lower order, a principle which applies to the angels as well as to the human hierarchy.[25] The uplifting movement is accomplished by God, "the thearchical spirit," [26] and by a wide array of intermediaries. The principle that "the second are uplifted by means of the first," [27] applies throughout the hierarchies: lay people are elevated by their clerical leaders,[28] these leaders are uplifted by means of the angels,[29] and subordinate angels by means of their celestial superiors:

> Then by this rank [of angels] the second one, and by the second one the third, and by the third our hierarchy is hierarchically uplifted, in due proportion and divine concord and according to this regulation of the harmonious source of order.[30]

This principle of intermediate and interlocking subjects and objects in the anagogical process is another example of how the overall dynamic of "return" is specified by the references to "uplifting."

The anagogical movement has so far been left in its spatial metaphor of "uplifting," with the divine goal giving the process soteriological

[23] EH 2 400C 34-38; cf. EH 7 568D 51.

[24] CH 1 121B 15f., 121C 35, CH 4 177C 7, EH 1 373B 16, DN 1 589B 14f., DN 3 680C 28, DN 13 980C 32, Ep. 8 1085C 44. The structure of these passages argues against the possibility that these forms are in the middle voice, as do the examples of the future passive where the middle voice is grammatically excluded (EH 4 472D 12, EH 7 565C 39, MT 1 1000A 3).

[25] CH 8 240B 16, CH 13 301C 40, DN 4 696B 11f., CH 4 180B 22, CH 5 196C 27; EH 5 505D 40-42, 508B 16-18.

[26] EH 3 424C 9, 428A 4; cf. DN 13 980B 27.

[27] EH 5 504C 31-33.

[28] EH 5 501D 49f., EH 6 533C 35ff.

[29] CH 4 181A 1-4, CH 8 241C 43, DN 4 696C 31f.

[30] CH 10 272D 11 to 273A 5; CH 8 240C 39f., CH 13 304AB 15-17, EH 5 501B 17f., EH 6 537B 18f.

overtones. To interpret this metaphor, we turn to a sweeping passage in the opening chapter of *The Divine Names*:

> But as for now, we use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upwards towards the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one. We leave behind us all our own notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and, to the extent that is proper, we consider the ray which transcends being.[31]

The latter, negative part of this process is well known to readers of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, especially of *The Mystical Theology*, chapter five. It is the preceding and presupposed movement which first deserves more attention. For this is a movement not simply "upward" but more specifically from symbols to truth.

A preliminary consideration of the starting point "from which" one is uplifted might suggest a flight away from something undesirable, such as the inferior plurality of sense perception.[32] Passages which are explicitly concerned with biblical exegesis supply two examples: the divine uplifts us "out of the sacredly shaped symbols to the simple heights of the heavenly hierarchies," and "that we might be uplifted from these most venerable images." [33] This pattern is also found in statements which embrace both the scriptural and ritual arenas. The human hierarchy needs the perceptible symbols of the written and unwritten initiations, reads one succinct text, "to lift us up from them into the domain of the intellect." [34] The soul, in summary, "is uplifted from certain variegated and pluralized symbols to the simple and united contemplations." [35]

But this anagogical movement is not primarily "away from" the perceptible symbols but rather "through" or "by means of" them. This pattern has already been seen several times. Chapter two above concluded with the statement that the mind is moved up as a result of the workings of perception or, literally, "through perceptible things." [36] In the two passages discussed in chapter four, the uplifting takes place "by means of" the biblical representations and the liturgical features, a parallel between the two texts which can now be seen in a wider context.[37] *The Celestial*

[31] DN 1 592CD 40-47.

[32] For example: ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν, in DN 4 705A 6f., and DN 13 980C 32f.; Ep. 8 1088A 13f.

[33] CH 1 124A 13-15 and 121C 33-35; cf. CH 1 121B 15f., and CH 15 328A 5-7.

[34] EH 1 377A 4f.

[35] DN 4 705B 19-21; cf. DN 5 821B 16f.

[36] διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν, DN 4 708D 49.

[37] CH 4 177C 8 and EH 4 472D 11.

Hierarchy's first chapter concludes with an important summary: the divine used perceptible images in the scriptures "so that he might lift us in spirit up through the perceptible to the intelligible." [38] As a whole, the human hierarchy "is variegated in perceptible symbols, and by means of them it is sacredly uplifted to the divine." [39] These expressions of an uplifting "through" or "by means of" the perceptible, whether in the Bible or in the liturgy, indicate that spatial and temporal symbols should not be dishonored, "for they are the descendents and bear the mark of the divine stamps; they are the manifest images of unspeakable and marvellous sights." [40] They are therefore consciously and carefully employed as a "guidance and a path to the intelligible things." [41]

The Dionysian argument for the importance of the symbolic is pushed even further. The realm of symbols is not merely an optional means through which one may be elevated; it is the *only* means. The uplifting of those not yet angelically free from sense perception is impossible without the use of symbolic representations. "For we contemplate [the mysteries described in the scriptures] solely by way of the perceptible symbols attached to them." [42] Similarly, regarding liturgical symbolism:

> For it is quite impossible that we humans should, in any material way, rise up to imitate and to contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without the aid of those material means capable of guiding us as our nature requires. Hence, any thinking person realizes that the appearances of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness. The beautiful odors which strike the senses are representations of intellectual diffusion. Material lights are images of the outpouring of an immaterial gift of light.[43]

Thus, for "our" uplifting, biblical and liturgical symbols not only may be used but *must* be used. This last quotation also takes us one step further: this guidance is properly employed insofar as it is properly understood.

[38] *διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ νοητά*, CH 1 124A 12f.; *διὰ τῶν φαινομένων*, CH 2 145B 22f.; *διὰ ποικίλων καὶ πολλῶν καὶ μεριστῶν*, Ep. 9 1112A 9. In the liturgical realm, besides EH 4 472D 11, see *δι' ὧν ἱερῶν αἰνιγμάτων* EH 4 476C 29.

[39] ... *συμβόλοις αἰσθητοῖς ποικίλλεται καὶ δὶ αὐτῶν ἱερῶς ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖων ἀνάγεται*, EH 5 501D 44-46; see also EH 1 373B 15f.

[40] Ep. 9 1108C 34-37; cf. Ep. 10 1117A 12f.

[41] EH 2 397C 32f., quoted in chapter three, n. 115.

[42] Ep. 9 1104B 17f.; cf. *χρὴ ἀναχθῆναι διὰ τῶν πλασμάτων*, CH 2 137A 2.

[43] CH 1 121CD 35-41. This passage continues with liturgical examples until 124A 5. Although these material things should be used, they should not be enjoyed for themselves, according to two rather Augustinian and Neoplatonic passages: the lovers of truth "withdraw from the attraction of material things" Ep. 10 1117B 17-19 and DN 8 896C 32f.

B. Iamblichus on Anagogical Theurgy

It may seem self-evident that liturgical and biblical symbols are important to the Pseudo-Areopagite only insofar as they are interpreted. But the significance of interpretation in the anagogical process should not be taken for granted. This chapter began with the metaphysical concept of "return," which was shown to be closely related to an "uplifting" through perceptible phenomena. Metaphysics encompasses epistemology precisely in the claim that this return and uplifting depend upon the *interpretation* of the perceptible as symbolic of the intelligible. Furthermore, the Areopagite's emphasis on the interpretation of symbols can clarify the relationship of his thought to that of an important Neoplatonist. While our primary concern has not been the patristic or Neoplatonic background of these issues, we should not slight the justification for theurgy advanced by Iamblichus. Recent studies allow a new appreciation of the thought and influence of this thinker,[44] especially of "the philosophical justification which he employs in defence of theurgy and the importance which this has for the sacramental theology of the later Greek Fathers." [45] Iamblichus had a great influence on the theurgy of late Neoplatonism, for he minimized purely rational contemplation as the way to divine union in favor of his interpretation of "anagogy," based on *The Chaldean Oracles*. By linking "procession and return" to "uplifting" [46] and thus seeing a "return" in anagogical theurgy, Iamblichus was the first, it is said, to identify the Platonists' metaphysical process with the Chaldeans' theurgy.[47]

In light of the exclusive attention generally given to the patristic background of Pseudo-Dionysian liturgical thought, a few similarities

[44] Besides the text by des Places of *de Mysteriis* (*Les Mystères d'Égypte* [Paris, 1966], abbreviated as dM) there is also *Iamblichi Chalcidensis In Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta*, edited with English translation and commentary by John M. Dillon (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973). Among the recent studies are F. W. Cremer, *Die chaldäischen Orakel und Jamblich "de mysteriis"* (Meisenheim: A. Hain, 1969); Peter Crome, *Symbol und Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache, Jamblichus, Plotin, Porphyrios, Proklos* (Munich: W. Fink, 1970); B. D. Larsen, *Jamblique de Chalcis, exégète et philosophe* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1972); *De Jamblique à Proclus*, edited by B. D. Larsen (Geneva: Vandoevres-Genève, 1975).

[45] Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis*, p. 29.

[46] When speaking of "procession and return," Iamblichus could substitute ἀναγωγή for ἐπιστροφή: dM 1.5.17.13f.; 1.19.58.16.

[47] Hans Lewy, *The Chaldean Oracles*, p. 489. See the note by des Places, dM, p. 86f. But in light of Lewy's own convincing argument for the (middle) Platonic sources of the Chaldean theurgists, it is difficult to imagine that they themselves had not already seen this relationship between Platonic themes and their theurgy.

with the views of Iamblichus concerning religious ritual should be pointed out.[48] The Dionysian triad of hierarchies, first of all, consists of an inferior group using obscure images, a superior realm where no material aids were needed, and "our" hierarchy as the "mean between extremes." [49] Iamblichus, whose well-known interest in triads and mean terms was formative for later Neoplatonism, spoke of a similar triad. At one extreme is the human "crowd" bound to material forms of worship, at the other are the select few whose pure and free minds permit an immaterial cult. An intermediate group shares in both types of worship, withdrawing from the inferior things and "taking them as a starting point for the more honorable." [50] For Iamblichus, the lower realm can serve as a starting point only when a key distinction is made, one reminiscent of a Pseudo-Dionysian concern:

> One should not understand acts performed both toward the gods and toward humans (such as prostrations, obeisances, gifts, and offerings) in the same way, but should take them separately according to the difference regarding the more honorable.[51]

Generations before the Pseudo-Areopagite, Iamblichus had already suggested that religious ritual had wondrous signs sent down from the divine realm in an accommodating self-manifestation in which "the unutterable is voiced by means of ineffable symbols, the shapeless is captured in shapes, things superior to every image are represented through images ...." [52] Furthermore, his uses of the language of "uplifting" or "anagogy" are somewhat similar to those of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. The Iamblichean terminology seems influenced by *The Chaldean Oracles'* ceremonial uplifting of the soul, called by Iamblichus himself "the hieratic uplifting among the Egyptians" [53] and now considered "the principal sacrament of the Chaldean theurgists." [54] This

[48] For a different, self-contained statement of these similarities, see my "Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysian Liturgical Theology," *Studia Patristica* vol. 17 (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), pp. 453-460.

[49] EH 5 501C 42f.

[50] dM 5.18.225.5-8. The contrast between the material and the immaterial is also drawn in 5.15.220.10-19 and discussed by des Places in the footnote on page 170f.

[51] dM 1.21.66.5-9. For example, prayer affects not the immutable gods, as it might appear, but rather those who pray, by returning them to the divine (dM 1.13.43.8; 1.12.42.2-5), by affecting what is intelligent or divine in them (dM 1.15.46.13f.; 5.26.237.16 to 238.6). For comparison with Pseudo-Dionysius, see CH 2 141C 37-39; on the example of prayer, see DN 3 680BCD.

[52] dM 1.15.65.6-12. For similar language in Dionysius, see EH 1 376D 40-46.

[53] dM 10.6.292.10.

[54] Lewy, *The Chaldean Oracles*, pp. 60 and 240. He also calls this "anagogy" their

"anagogy" has both soteriological and mystical significance, for it summarizes the gifts of the divine presence, is tied to union with the gods, and serves to define "ecstasy." [55] His most common use of the language of elevation concerns the "uplifting" force of religious ritual, whether prayer, sacrifices, or theurgy in general.[56] To summarize the numerous examples: the summoning invocations do not actually call down the gods but rather elevate the human toward the divine, time spent in prayer lifts "us" up, the offering of the sacrifices "uplifts us by means of the sacrifices and the sacrificial fire toward the fire of the gods." [57] The uplifting of the soul to the gods, followed by union with them, takes place by means of theurgy's divine names and signs, both in fact called "anagogical." [58] This "ascent by means of the summonings" is indeed the goal of theurgy.[59]

Iamblichus is discussed here for two reasons. He provides both a general similarity to Pseudo-Dionysius at a point where there is no patristic precedent, and yet also a specific difference of emphasis which is central to our argument in this chapter. On the question of precedents, W. Völker has emphasized the Areopagite's background in the Alexandrian tradition, except for the liturgical material where Dionysius leaves the Alexandrian path and follows instead the examples of Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia.[60] Völker persuasively points out certain similarities between Theodore's homilies and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, but he largely omits a crucial difference.[61] Theodore's symbolism of the eucharist is thoroughly typological, correlating features of the rite with events in Jesus' life and passion. The Pseudo-Areopagite's interpretation, on the other hand, is timelessly allegorical, relating the activities of the synaxis not primarily to past events but to eternal truths. The censing procession, to repeat just one example of those already discussed, is given a timeless interpretation as the eternal procession and yet remaining of the divine presence.[62] For this type of interpretation,

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"chief mystery" (pp. 177 and 487). For a general discussion, see his third chapter and eighth excursus.

[55] dM 2.6.81.15f., cf. 2.6.83.3, 10.4.290.3, 10.5.291.9; *ἕνωσις*: 1.19.59.11-13; *ἔκστασις*: 3.7.114.9-11.

[56] dM 5.26.240.4; 5.11.214.8 and 215.3; 8.4.267.7-10.

[57] dM 1.12.42.14; 5.26.239.4; 5.11.215.3-5.

[58] dM 7.4.256.2, 4.2.184.5, 1.12.42.16; 2.11.97.5.

[59] dM 1.12.42.1; 3.31.179.10. Other uses of *ἄνοδος* occur in 8.6.269.10 and 8.8.271.15.

[60] Völker, *Kontemplation und Ekstase*, p. 106.

[61] Ibid., pp. 117-120. Völker is aware of a difference but does not elaborate: "Was bei Theodor ganz fehlt, ist das spekulative Element." *Kontemplation und Ekstase*, p. 118.

[62] EH 3 428D 41 to 429A 8; cf. EH 4 476D 38-45.

Iamblichus may be a better precedent than Theodore of Mopsuestia or any other patristic author. Although the evidence is sparse, the example of Iamblichus' interpretation of the Chaldean ritual of "anagogy" is instructive. He saw its background in Platonic epistemology and interpreted it accordingly as "an uplifting toward the intelligible truth," [63] thus situating this theurgic rite within the larger framework of procession and return. In general, concludes Hans Lewy, Iamblichus seized "the possibility to interpret the injunctions of the *Oracles* concerning ritual ceremonies as figurative expressions of spiritual experiences." [64] It is this allegorical interpretation of ritual which dominates in Pseudo-Dionysius and in some followers but not in his patristic predecessors.

Yet there is also a difference of emphasis at this point. Iamblichus, as detailed above, usually linked the language of "anagogy" to the force of the rituals *per se*; the signs and the rites themselves, with no mention of their interpretation, are considered "uplifting." This is the primary yet not the exclusive emphasis of Iamblichus, for he can also link the uplifting action to the process of interpretation.

> Listen therefore to the intelligible interpretation of the symbols according to the mind of the Egyptians, abandoning that illusion of these symbolical things which comes from visual and aural impressions, and elevating yourself to the intelligible truth.[65]

It may be that Iamblichus inherited a situation which emphasized anagogical rites, and that he himself began a shift of emphasis toward anagogical interpretation. In any case, Pseudo-Dionysius invariably linked the uplifting movement to the spiritual process of understanding the rituals and never to the rites by themselves. Thus the remainder of this chapter will consider what may have seemed obvious and therefore less important without a comparison with Iamblichus, namely the cognitive dimensions of Pseudo-Dionysian "anagogy." We must keep in mind,

[63] dM 10.6.292.12; cf. 5.20.227.5f.

[64] Lewy, *The Chaldean Oracles*, p. 176. For the most recent treatment of theurgy and for the standard bibliography, see Andrew Smith's study *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

[65] dM 7.2.250.13-18. Despite the reflexive construction in this passage, Iamblichus, like Pseudo-Dionysius, was careful to keep the human role passive, for the power in theurgy comes from the gods. These similarities do not necessarily mean that the Areopagite read *de Mysteriis*. But it is probable that he was at least aware of the theurgical side of Neoplatonism, perhaps through Proclus who, however, contributed nothing new in this field.

however, that for Dionysius this interpretation is not an objective human inquiry but a spiritual process led by the benevolent deity.

C. Anagogical Interpretation and its Goal

Earlier in this chapter, "return" and "uplifting" were distinguished not because the latter is a different movement but because it explains more concretely the dynamics of the one elevation in Pseudo-Dionysius, namely that it takes place "through knowledge." [66] This is certainly no detached knowledge of specific facts but rather a spiritual contemplation. The suggestion in chapter two above that the scriptures were inseparable from their interpretation is now expanded to include the liturgy; even the liturgical acts of baptism and the eucharist are inseparable from the process of interpreting them. The Areopagite's emphasis is not on these rites as objective events, but on "the explanations of the symbols," [67] namely an elevation from their perceptible form to their intelligible meaning, a careful parallel to the anagogical interpretation of the Bible.

Preceding chapters have already suggested the cognitive side of the scriptural "uplifting." In a passage discussed in chapter four, the anagogical movement takes place "through the representations," which we now take to mean "through their interpretation." That these symbols are beheld with a "supernatural perception" indicates a facet of special comprehension.[68] Chapter six, furthermore, discussed how the incongruous biblical images "uplift our mind" and how this uplifting depends upon the appropriate "defining" of the dissimilarities[69] and the incorporating of negative theology within itself. The "anagogical" method regarding the Bible starts with the mind's acquisition of knowledge. Yet the "teachings of the scriptures" [70] are not simply educational but also spiritually uplifting.

This leads to a new, rather technical use of the term "anagogy" or "uplifting." Concluding his exegesis of the colorful biblical descriptions of the angels, Dionysius adds, "you will find that each form carries an 'anagogical' explanation of the representational images." [71] The metaphor

[66] *διὰ τῆς ... γνώσεως*, DN 5 825A 2-4; cf. Ep. 7 1080B 19-23.

[67] *οἱ τῶν συμβόλων λόγοι*, EH 1 377A 6.

[68] *ὑπερκοσμιοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς*, CH 4 177C 16f.; cf. DN 5 821B 17f., and *ἐν πανάγνοις νοὸς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἀναγομένους*, CH 3 165D 44f.

[69] CH 2 141A 12, 144C 33.

[70] EH 5 508B 19f.; cf. EH 3 436A 5-7, and the discussion of the scripture readings below in chapter eight.

[71] *ἀναγωγικὴν τῶν τυπωτικῶν εἰκόνων ἀνακάθαρσιν*, CH 15 336C 32-34.

of uplifting is here tied to the process of interpretation. The Areopagite can be even more explicit: "it is possible that the iconography of the wheels of the mind be explained according to another 'anagogy'." [72] Here an explanation of the scriptures is an uplifting, and the uplifting is the explanation. While such a specialized use of the term "anagogy" was common in patristic hermeneutics after Origen, rare were the occasions when the literary craftsman of these texts isolated it from the larger metaphor of "uplifting" and used it in such a technical sense. Yet this understanding of "anagogy" helps explain its otherwise redundant coupling with other terms of elevation; for example, "to be sacredly raised up by means of the appearances to the upliftings," or even "we are uplifted to the ... upliftings." [73] In these two passages the language of "uplifting" appears in both a verbal form to mean the process of spiritual interpretation as elevation, and also a technical, substantive form to indicate the interpretation or explanation which is the provisional goal of that process, thus doubly confirming the interpretive nature of Pseudo-Dionysian "anagogy" and the uplifting dimension of his biblical hermeneutics. This technical use of "anagogy" to mean an "explanation" is also applied to liturgical interpretation. Dionysius begins the "Contemplation" of the sacrament of myron with such an application.

> The introductory "anagogy" of this perfecting sacred-act ... denotes that what is sacred and fragrant to the mind is concealed by divine men.[74]

Use of the word "uplifting" to mean an explanation or interpretation, whether of a scriptural passage or a liturgical act, points to the term's only other special use, the upbringing or education of a child.[75] Both uses underscore the pedagogical or instructional nature of Pseudo-Dionysian "anagogy."

The association of the language of "uplifting" with spiritual knowledge applies to both the human hierarchy, with its scriptural and liturgical components, and also the celestial hierarchy: "A hierarchy is ... uplifted to an imitation of God according to the enlightenments which are divinely given to it." [76] A final example can also serve to introduce consideration of the cognitive component in the upward movement's goal.

[72] CH 15 337D 47f.

[73] *ἱερῶς ἀνατείνεσθαι διὰ τῶν' φαινομένων ἐπὶ τὰς ὑπερκοσμίους ἀναγωγάς*, CH 2 145B 22f.; *ἐπὶ τὰς ... ἀναχθῶμεν ἀναγωγὰς*, CH 1 121C 34.

[74] EH 4 473B 15. Other associations, in liturgical contexts, of uplifting and knowledge or understanding: EH 3 424C 6-10, EH 5 504C 24-28, 513D 43f., EH 6 532D 44-46.

[75] EH 7 568B 17 and 27; 568C 34, 37, and 44.

[76] CH 3 164D 6-8; regarding the angelic hierarchy, see CH 7 208B 26-30.

> Sacred tradition teaches us that one has to be introduced to the consecrating invocations through processes of initiation which are not public. You must be perfected in a more holy and uplifting mode of life by love for God and by sacred activities. And he who is the enlightening source of every rite will uplift you to the supreme understanding of them.[77]

Here learning, enlightenment, and understanding are explicitly linked to the process of being uplifted, particularly regarding the goal of such elevation.

Although the motif of "procession and return" does not refer to a movement in space or time, its "sequence" now brings us to the goal or end of the elevation. That which began in the ineffable transcendence of God, proceeded "down" into the spatio-temporal realm of symbols even as far as the most incongruous of descriptions, and then reversed its course, uplifting the faithful with itself, now returns toward its endpoint. The ultimate goal is that same ineffable transcendence of God. As discussed above, it is the "anagogical" expressions of this ascent which provide the concrete details of the means toward this ultimate destination, and thus of the intermediate aims or goals along the way. These goals are understood as provisional in that they complete the first ascent "from the perceptible to the intelligible," but are then abandoned in the final, silent approach to a divinity beyond all conceptions.

The procession into plurality is here balanced by a return or elevation from plurality to unity.[78] As in the passage discussed at length in chapter four, the goal of biblical uplifting is often expressed as "the simplicity of the heavenly minds." [79] The same pattern is found in passages concerning liturgical matters, and concerning both realms of symbols.[80] "Simplicity" as a goal of "anagogy" is a thoroughly epistemological theme, for this movement is from the plurality of the sense world to the simplicity of the intelligible realm. The goal is "the simple and unified truth of the intelligible sights."[81] The intelligible illumination "returns [them] from numerous false notions and, filling them with the one unifying light, it

[77] EH 7 565C 35-40.

[78] *τὸ μεριστὸν αὐτῶν πλῆθος ἐπιστρεφούσης εἰς τὴν ὅλην ἑνότητα*, DN 11 948D 9f.; see also CH 1 120B 10 to 121A 1, CH 12 293B 19f., DN 13 980C 32-34, MT 1 997B 20, Ep. 9 1112A 9-11, as discussed earlier in this chapter (notes 13-16).

[79] CH 15 328A 6; cf. CH 1 121B 15 and 23, *ἐπὶ τὰς ἁπλᾶς τῶν οὐρανίων ἱεραρχιῶν ἀκρότητας* 124A 14f., CH 2 137A 2f.

[80] Liturgical: EH 3 429A 13, 440A 6f., and EH 4 472D 11; both realms: CH 1 121C 34, EH 1 373A 12, DN 4 705B 20f.

[81] DN 1 592C 42f., quoted more fully above, note 31.

gathers their clashing fancies into the single, true, pure, and coherent knowledge." [82]

The cognitive side of the goal of the anagogical movement can be expressed by the metaphor of light, or by more direct references to knowledge, to understanding, and especially to contemplation. The metaphor of physical light is used to express the goal of elevation in several contexts: the statement of a general rule, the uplifting powers of prayer, and the final ascent to the ultimately blinding light of perfect darkness.[83] Since the light returns all beings to itself, human minds are raised up to the "ray" which enlightens them,[84] and celestial beings "are uplifted to the higher and most lustrous of the divine splendors." [85] Naturally, this use of the imagery of light to express the idea of understanding as a goal of "anagogy" includes the double meaning of the term "enlightenment," as in this passage regarding the thearchical hiddenness:

> Yet every being endowed with intelligence and reason, which, totally and as far as it can, is returned to be united with Him, which is forever being raised up towards His divine enlightenments ...[86]

Thus *The Celestial Hierarchy* opens with the exhortation that we "raise our eyes to the paternally-transmitted enlightenment coming from sacred scriptures." [87] References to the scriptures often employ this idea of enlightenment and the imagery of light as a goal. "We are raised up to the enlightening beams of the sacred scriptures and are led by their light." [88] On the liturgical side, this metaphor is represented by the frequent references to the sacramental sights; for example, "the light-bearing order of priests guides the initiates to the divine visions of the sacraments." [89]

But the Areopagite is no slave to his own metaphors. Many passages express this goal as special knowledge or spiritual comprehension in quite direct language. In general terms, one is led "from the hidden to the plain" and uplifted to the truth, just as Isaiah "was lifted up to the intelligible knowledge of the things seen" in his vision.[90] The designation

[82] DN 4 701B 21-24.
[83] EH 5 504C 31-33, DN 3 680C 21-29, MT 1 1000A 1-3.
[84] DN 4 700B 24f., DN 1 589A 4-6.
[85] EH 6 537B 19f.; cf. EH 4 481B 20f.
[86] CH 12 293B 19-22; cf. EH 5 501B 17-19, CH 9 260C 26f.
[87] CH 1 121A 6-8.
[88] DN 1 589B 13-15; cf. DN 1 588A 7-11, 592C 43, DN 2 645A 4f.
[89] EH 5 505D 40f.
[90] *ἐκ τοῦ κρυφίου πρὸς τὸ ἐμφανὲς ἄγεται*, CH 13 305B 26-29; DN 7 865C 23f., EH 2 401C 30-34; *πρὸς τὴν νοητὴν τῶν ὁρωμένων ἀνήγετο γνῶσιν*, CH 13 305A 4f. According to the

"intelligible" is a frequent abbreviation for this superior realm of conceptual enlightenment as the goal of the uplifting:

> so that [God] might lift us by means of the perceptible up to the intelligible. ... Our hierarchy needs perceptible things to lift us up from them to the intelligible things.[91]

But the author's most significant expression for the goal of this uplifting is "contemplation" or "θεωρία." *The Divine Names* summarizes what is elsewhere specified as biblical and sacramental interpretation, namely that the soul "is uplifted from certain variegated and pluralized symbols to the simple and unified contemplations." [92] Far beyond its use for subtitles in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*,[93] the term "contemplation" can be used to indicate that the eagle sees, that Isaiah did not see the seraphim's feet, that an artist views his subject, and that the myron is not actually seen by the many.[94] As in this last example, contemplation is actually a spiritual perception of the highest order, especially in the angels' own contemplation which transcends physical perception and needs no symbols.[95] It is thus closely tied not only to the metaphor of light, but also to the explicit statements of knowledge and understanding.[96] While humans are not capable of pure contemplations, they do resemble the angels by "sharing in intelligent contemplations" as the goal of the anagogical movement.[97]

Although unaided contemplation of the divine realm is humanly impossible,[98] the "good" raises sacred minds up to the desired goal, to "its permitted contemplation, communion, and likening." [99] This occurs when

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Migne reading of Ep. 9 1112A 7-11, the aim is even the knowledge of God (ἐπὶ τὴν ... θεογνωσιάν). Yet such an ambitious and unqualified goal for human cognition is found only in this reading, which is itself disputed. On purely internal grounds, perhaps the variant reading θεωριάν is therefore preferable.

[91] *ὅπως ἀν ἡμᾶς ἀναγάγοι διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ νοητὰ* ..., CH 1 124A 12f; *ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχία δεομένη τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰς τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰ νοητὰ θειοτέραν ἡμῶν ἀναγωγήν*, EH 1 377A 3-5; cf. DN 4 708D 43-45. This last passage goes on to name "contemplative conceptions" (*πρὸς θεωρητικὰς νοήσεις* line 49f.) as elevation's goal, as does CH 15 337B 28-31. See also *ἐκ τῶν φαινομένων ἐπὶ τὸ νοητὸν ἡ ἄνοδος*, Proclus, *In Parmenidem* 630.29f.

[92] *ἐπὶ τὰς ἁπλᾶς καὶ ἡνωμένας ἀνάγεται θεωρίας*, DN 4 705B 19-21.

[93] On these subtitles, see chapter three, note 112.

[94] CH 15 337A 11, CH 13 305A 3, EH 4 473C 39, 476B 20, cf. 476C 27.

[95] CH 7 205C 29, 208B 26-28, 208D 50, 212A 5; cf. CH 2 144A 9, CH 7 205C 29, 208C 32.

[96] CH 15 337B 28-31, EH 3 437A 8, EH 5 508A 1, EH 7 565B 25, DN 1 597B 26, DN 4 708D 49f., and Ep. 9 1108D 49.

[97] *κοινωνοῦσα ταῖς νοεραῖς θεωρίαις*, EH 5 501D 43f., cf. DN 1 592C 31f.

[98] DN 1 588C 36 and 592D 49.

they are shown the full meaning of the divine self-manifestation in perceptible symbols. On the biblical side, it is the scriptural names for God and the visions of the angels which are spiritually understood or contemplated.[100] "It remains now to contemplate that final rank in the hierarchy of angels." [101] But the word "contemplation" does not designate a process so much as the intended result or goal. In biblical interpretation, "we" are "raised up to the intelligible contemplations." [102]

This pattern also dominates the concept of contemplation in its frequent liturgical contexts. The rank of lay people is called the "contemplative order" because the baptized are uplifted "into a contemplative and illuminated condition." [103] "Contemplations" are actually the sacred interpretations of the rituals, as distinguished from their performance and from participation in them.[104] Although he concedes that the rites may have been contemplated more clearly by someone else,[105] the author provides his own interpretations in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in the subsections entitled "Contemplation." The programmatic statement which opens the chapter on the synaxis, for example, summarizes the way that the "uplifting" interpretation of liturgical rites has their "contemplation" as its goal: after setting forth the sacrament's features, it is necessary to "be uplifted to the sacred contemplation of it." [106]

In summary, the concept of "uplifting" is at the heart of the Pseudo-Dionysian enterprise. Whether expressed in the standard Neoplatonic language of "return" or in the patristic terminology of "anagogy," the "upward" movement so omnipresent in the Areopagite's corpus has a single, ultimate goal in God. The means and intermediate steps in this journey are presented in terms of anagogical interpretation. The human

[99] DN 1 588D 46.

[100] The contemplation of the divine names: DN 9 909B 8, DN 11 949C 38f.; cf. DN 3 684C 36, DN 5 821B 16-19, DN 6 857B 22.

[101] CH 9 257B 4f., cf. CH 6 200C 15, CH 13 308B 22.

[102] CH 2 140A 11; cf. CH 2 141C 35f., CH 15 328A 2, and Isaiah in CH 13 304C 25.

[103] EH 6 536B 13-16; EH 5 504B 18, 505D 45, EH 6 532B 20-26, 536D 43. A deeper and broader contemplation, namely of all the rites, is shared by the superior orders like the monks (EH 5 504B 19f., EH 6 532D 39, 536C 23), the priests (EH 5 516B 19), and the hierarchs (EH 2 397A 2, EH 3 441D 43); but the uninitiated are not led to any contemplation at all (EH 3 428C 29).

[104] EH 3 425B 19f., 432C 33, EH 5 508A 1; EH 6 532B 18-20, 532C 28, 532D 40, EH 7 568C 42, and perhaps DN 1 588D 46.

[105] EH 7 568D 48f.

[106] EH 3 424C 6-10. In this text and in EH 4 472D, the tripartite chapters of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* echo the Neoplatonic triad of remaining (the introduction), procession (setting out the various components of the rite), and return (the spiritual elevation toward contemplation). For further examples of θεωρία as the goal rather than the process, see CH 1 121C 36f., CH 3 165D 42-45, EH 2 397A 2, and EH 3 428C 32.

hierarchy is uplifted by means of the perceptible realm of biblical and liturgical symbols. Some similarities with Iamblichus' view of theurgy are evident, but the point of the comparison is to highlight the thoroughly interpretive nature of Pseudo-Dionysian anagogy, namely that the uplifting does not occur by virtue of the rites or symbols by themselves but rather in their interpretation, in the upward movement through the perceptible to the intelligible. Although there are a few exceptions,[107] the term "uplifting" generally indicates the process of interpretation while "contemplation" is a typical expression for the goal of this movement, namely the interpretations themselves. "It is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine."[108] Because all contemplations must ultimately be abandoned, this uplifting is not the last word in Pseudo-Dionysius. Nevertheless, since the indispensable foundation for rising still higher, namely for the abandonment of all conceptions, is this prior ascent from the perceptible to the intelligible, the anagogical movement receives a cherished place in the Areopagite's system and a full exposition in his corpus.

[107] As when *ἀναγωγή* is used to mean "an interpretation" (CH 15 337D 47f.) or when *θεωρία* is associated with the *process* of uplifting (EH 4 472D 11f.).

[108] EH 1 373B 14-16.

8

The Synthesis

After their individual introductions in chapters two and three, the Areopagite's Bible and liturgy were shown to have much in common. In chapter four, the Neoplatonic framework of "procession and return" was proposed as a way of understanding Dionysian biblical hermeneutics and liturgical interpretation. For Dionysius, the divine procession is less metaphysical than revelatory; it is a manifestation of the unified and simple divine realm in the lower, human realm of perceptible plurality, namely the spatial and temporal symbols of the scriptures and the liturgy (chapter five). Biblical symbolism includes a procession still further down to those incongruous depictions of the celestial which jolt the reader into negating their literal meaning and seeking a higher interpretation (chapter six). In both the Bible and the liturgy, the "uplifting" return to the divine takes place precisely in the interpretation of these symbols, ascending through their perceptible forms to the higher level of their intelligible meanings (chapter seven). Within this overall metaphor of a movement in space, biblical symbolism thus represents a lower descent. In this eighth chapter, we begin by asking whether liturgical symbols, conversely, are in some sense "higher" than their scriptural counterparts. The question of the relationship between biblical and liturgical symbols will first draw together and climax the previous chapters, and then illuminate the meaning of the order of the Dionysian treatises.

A. The "More Immaterial" Symbols

The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy's explicit comparison of the scriptures and the liturgy provides a natural starting point.

> We say that these scriptures are most to be honoured, whatever our inspired sacred-initiators set down for us in the holy tablets of written scripture. Furthermore, whatever has been given by these sacred men in a

> more immaterial initiation, as already given to our neighbors in the heavenly hierarchy, from mind to mind, this too our leaders have revealed through the means of verbal expression and thus corporeal but at the same time more immaterial since it is free from writing. But the inspired hierarchs have transmitted these things not in the common part of the sacred act in undisguised conceptions, but in the sacred symbols.[1]

This passage raises two questions: How is the liturgical tradition "more immaterial" than the scriptures? How is this difference related to the liturgical distinction of a "common part" and the sacred symbols?

The liturgy, first of all, is "more immaterial" in terms of both form and content. The similarity of the liturgical tradition to the angels' superior mode of knowing lies first in its immateriality of form, for it is free from writing. The contrast between the written and the unwritten[2] is heightened by the use of the author's most physical expression for the scriptures, namely "tablets." This specialized term, with its connotation of the scriptures' physical appearance as a material object, is employed only thrice in the entire corpus, each time to contrast the scriptures with the less material realm of the liturgy.[3] The contrast between the written and the unwritten is also sharpened by the author's general refusal to divulge any liturgical text. While he mentions in passing that certain invocations must not be interpreted in writing,[4] in actual practice he makes the liturgical tradition even more "unwritten" by never citing a single liturgical text. Even the simple word "Alleluia" is tortuously avoided and its Greek translation is given instead.[5] The liturgy does use physical speech and is therefore not completely immaterial like the angelic knowledge which needs no sense perception at all. But relative to the scriptures, it is more immaterial since it is free from their physical format. This superiority of form has one further expression, although not emphasized. The liturgical tradition is transmitted directly "from mind to mind" rather

[1] EH 1 376BC 25-34. The term "sacred-initiator" (ἱεροτελεστής) is nowhere else used to mean scripture writer. Either this passage is an exception, or the choice of δεδώρηται allows an interpretation suggested by the usual use of "sacred-initiator" (chapter three, n. 27), namely that these leaders have passed down the scriptures from the authors to "us."

[2] See also EH 1 376D 45f.

[3] Besides in the text at hand (EH 1 376C 27), δέλτος is twice used regarding the scripture readings (EH 3 425C 28 and 429C 29), which are preliminary to the more exclusive rituals, as discussed below. It does not appear where the point of comparative materiality is not made, even when the Bible as an object is placed on the hierarch's head during his ordination (EH 5 509B 11f., 513C 27f.).

[4] EH 7 565C 30-34.

[5] EH 4 485A 15-18, cf. EH 2 396C 33f. and EH 4 473A 9f. See above, chapter five, n. 52.

than through an impersonal document. More specifically, liturgical sights are viewed directly by the worshippers themselves, while biblical visions, the subject of much Pseudo-Dionysian exegesis, are known only indirectly through the descriptions written by those who experienced them.

Furthermore, the liturgical realm is called "more immaterial" not only because of the varying forms of the two traditions but also because of their actual contents. Although the contrast is never explicitly acknowledged, our elusive author pursued two different emphases in his actual interpretations of the scriptures and of the liturgy. As discussed above in chapter five, his exegesis concentrates on the material descriptions of the heavenly, on the physical shapes attributed to the angels and to God. In the biblical realm, the formless is expressed by the physical plurality of extension in spatial forms. The emphasis in liturgical matters is quite different. Disregarding the material symbolism of the building, the vestments, or the altar, and de-emphasizing even the sacramental objects, the Areopagite consistently concentrated on liturgical events and ritual movements. In the liturgical realm, the timeless is expressed by the sequential plurality of extension in temporal actions. With these two emphases, Dionysius has constructed a pattern which subtly supports the superior immateriality of the liturgy. It is more immaterial not only in its form, namely oral tradition instead of physical tablets, but also in its content, which concerns the dimension of time rather than that of space. Of course, these two components of sense perception, namely spatial and temporal plurality, are both inferior to the pure intelligence of the celestial zone, which is metaphysically simple and free from all perceptible dimensions, whether space or time. But the physical and the sequential dimensions are not equally inferior. In the Pseudo-Areopagite's intellectual climate, shared by many church fathers and Platonists, the spatial dimension of physical matter is "lower" or further from the divine than is the realm of time. Thus in this respect the liturgical realm is indeed "higher" than the biblical: the starting point for its uplifting or anagogical interpretation is not the lowly realm of matter and physical descriptions but the more immaterial dimension of time and sequential plurality.

At this point a potential objection should be raised. Were not the lower, more incongruous depictions said to be "more uplifting" than the higher, more similar ones? Would not this exegetical principle, if applied to the difference between the biblical and liturgical spheres, suggest that scriptural symbolism, precisely because it is "lower" or more incongruous, is in fact superior in function to the less incongruous liturgical symbols? To answer this objection, we first recall that the advantage of incongruous biblical images applied only to a very specific context. In

the second chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, the author argued that incongruities are more uplifting than similarities, in that the former cry out for the interpretation which the latter often elude.[6] The comparison is between interpreted dissimilarities and *un*interpreted similarities. The latter do not uplift the mind at all but ensnare it on their own level of sense perception. An application of this argument to the difference between biblical and liturgical symbols, when both are interpreted, is premature. Nevertheless, the question of incongruity is important at this point, for it illuminates a difference between the two spheres which eventually will permit the conclusion that the scriptural realm is "more uplifting" than the liturgical, although in a limited way.

Regarding the congruity of symbols, it was suggested above that a certain evolution can be seen when one moves through *The Celestial Hierarchy* to *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. There is clearly a formal continuity between these treatises, for the opening chapter of the latter refers back to a work on the heavenly ranks.[7] Furthermore, the three opening chapters of *The Celestial Hierarchy* provide an introduction to both treatises. The first chapter concerns both the angelic and the human hierarchies,[8] while the third concerns the nature of any hierarchy. It is the fourth chapter which finally begins specific consideration of the celestial hierarchy.[9] Thus it should not be surprising if the second chapter's concern for incongruity in the depiction of the heavenly has some application in both treatises. There is, however, an evolution of emphasis. The notion of incongruity in symbolism is first introduced pedagogically and then incorporated into the general process of interpretation. *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter fifteen, provides interpretations which are similar to the examples of that treatise's second chapter, namely the transferring of attributes from the sense world to the higher intelligible realm. But in contrast to that earlier discussion, the fifteenth and final chapter makes only a few explicit references to the concept of incongruity and none at all to the underlying role of negative theology in the process of interpreting symbols. When the author moves on to *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the notion of incongruity is not introduced again, and the

[6] CH 2 141AB; see above, chapter six, n. 33.
[7] EH 1 372C 31-42, see also EH 4 480D.
[8] After the opening paragraphs concerning general hierarchical principles (CH 1 120B to 121C 27), this chapter is explicitly concerned first for "our" hierarchy (121C 28 to 124A 5) with a side reference to the angels (lines 30-32), and then for the angelic hierarchy (124A 5-15) with a side reference to "ours" (lines 8f.).
[9] CH 4 177B 3-5.

principles of negative theology are nowhere mentioned. The liturgical symbols are never presented as dissimilar, and at one point are even called "precise images."[10] Yet, as we have seen, the dynamics of biblical and liturgical interpretation are identical: "we" are uplifted by means of the perceptible attributes to their intelligible meanings. In this movement beyond perceptible symbols, whether scriptural and incongruous or liturgical and more precise, anagogical interpretation transcends and thus implicitly negates the lower level of sense perception. When the sequence of his treatises leads to ritual concerns, the Areopagite neither contradicts nor abandons his own principles of negative theology, but rather assumes them into his interpretive method. Just as these principles were hard at work but largely unacknowledged by the end of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, so here in the subsequent and companion treatise they are apparent in actual practice but never discussed in theory. Although the arena of ceremonial symbolism requires a more discerning and experienced interpreter, since it does not jolt the beginner with obvious dissimilarities, the basic process of interpretation is nevertheless identical.

This process leads to the higher realm of intelligible contemplations, a goal or endpoint which is identical for biblical exegesis and for liturgical interpretation. The only difference between the two spheres is in the starting point of their "upward movement," whether symbols based upon spatial extension or those based upon the less material realm of temporal motion. Thus even when the liturgical "congruities" do not elude interpretation, biblical symbolism could still be considered "more uplifting," not because the endpoint of its anagogical interpretation is "higher," but rather, to press the metaphor still further, because its incongruous starting point is "lower." The sequence of the two hierarchical treatises presents the "lower" images as the starting point for the interpretation of all symbols. In the context of a pedagogical development, scriptural interpretation precedes the more advanced task of understanding the less incongruous symbols used in worship. This sequence of the two treatises has a paradigm in the role of the scriptural readings within the liturgy, and can also help explain the overall order of the Dionysian works.

B. The Readings and the Rites

The major quotation which opened this chapter made an explicit and revealing comparison between the Bible and the liturgy. It then linked that

[10] EH 2 401C 35

comparison to a liturgical distinction between a "common" part of the service and the "sacred symbols."[11] This distinction is marked by the dismissal of the lowest orders after the scripture readings. Lest a discussion of these readings be thought an insignificant source of information on the Areopagite's biblical hermeneutics, we recall that his only references to "canonical" writings and to the relationship between the testaments occurred precisely in presenting the liturgical readings of the scriptures.[12]

The sequence is identical in the "synaxis" and in the consecration of the myron: the hierarch's censing procession is followed by the Psalms and the scripture readings, and then the dismissal.[13] The role of the Psalms is to unite the faithful in their preparation for the sacred events. The unison of the Psalmic melody, says Dionysius, suggests the worshippers' union with the divine, within themselves, and with each other.[14] In general, the role of the scripture readings is to expand and clarify what may have been compressed and opaque in the Psalms.[15] But the author does not say how many readings there were; nor does he indicate from what specific parts of the Bible they were taken, except that both testaments were represented. Nor does he say whether anything came in between them, or distinguished one, such as a reading from the gospels, from another.

The Areopagite's concern is rather the role that these readings play in the spiritual life of the lowest lay orders. In fact, these orders, "the orders being purified," are often defined precisely in terms of the effects which the readings have upon them. As a group they are presented as those dismissed before the sacred acts, and as individual orders they are identified and distinguished by the different ways in which the biblical readings affect them.[16] The relationship of the lowest orders to the readings is not accidental, but an essential part of the hierarchy's triadic structure. It is the purifying order of deacons which reads the scriptures and then administers the dismissal of those being purified.[17]

When it is the readings which are under direct discussion, they too are presented not in terms of their contents, but in terms of their effects upon

[11] EH 1 376C 32-34.

[12] EH 3 429CD 26-44 and 432AB 8-23, as discussed above in chapter two.

[13] EH 3 425BC 20-32, and EH 4 473A 1-6.

[14] EH 4 425B 24-27, 429D 45 to 432A 8; other references to the Psalms: 429C 26, 432C 31, EH 4 473A 5, EH 7 556C 37.

[15] EH 4 432AB 8-12.

[16] EH 6 529D 7 to 532B 19, 536D 42f. Much of the information provided above in chapter three to introduce the lay orders was gleaned from texts concerning the liturgical reading of the scriptures.

[17] EH 3 425BC 27-34, EH 5 508B 18-20.

the hearers, especially the lowest orders. In the myron and the synaxis rites,

> The singing and reading of the scriptures incubate the uninitiated toward life-giving sonship. They bring about a sacred return among the impurely possessed. They deliver from the opponents' terrifying curse those who are possessed through a lack of courage. ... Sacred minds turned off inferior things and disposed to holiness will draw from these readings the holy power of protection against all relapse into evil. They fully purify anyone needing something to be completely holy. They lead the sacred people to the divine images with which they can enter into their vision and communion. They nourish the perfect, filling them and unifying their likeness to the One with blessed and intelligible sights.[18]

This passage presents the impact of the scripture readings on several categories of hearers, arranged in an ascending hierarchical sequence. The "uninitiated" whom this text mentions first are the catechumens, identified elsewhere as those "yet being incubated by the paternal scriptures."[19] Dionysius was fond of the image of the "incubating scriptures"[20] as applied to the catechumens' second birth. They are hatched, so to speak, by the introductory nourishment of the shaping and life-giving scriptures.[21] The metaphor concerns the purification administered by the deacons, for this purifying order reads the scriptures, "cleansing and incubating the uninitiated by the purifying enlightenments and teachings of the scriptures."[22] This purification is associated with instruction, and the scripture lessons are central to the teaching process; indeed the author never mentions any other educational occasions.[23]

> The sacred chanting and readings of the scriptures teach [those yet being initiated] the rules of a virtuous life and, before this, the complete purification from the evil that causes destruction.[24]

Thus the first power, that of purification, is not exclusively associated with baptism but is also the primary purpose of the opening features of the synaxis and myron ceremonies.

[18] EH 4 476D 45 to 477B 17.
[19] EH 4 432D 42f.
[20] τοῖς μαιευτικοῖς λογίοις, EH 6 532A 3f.
[21] EH 4 433A 12f.
[22] EH 5 508B 18-20.
[23] Dionysius never bothers to say anything about catechetical instruction in the sequence described in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, chapter two, or anywhere else in the corpus, although he seems to presuppose it (EH 2 393D 40f.).
[24] EH 3 428B 13-16.

Similarly, the scriptures have a definite effect upon another inferior order, those who are possessed. The biblical readings work their "sacred return," [25] continues the text, and take away their fear. This is the rank which "the power of the scriptures is still in the process of strengthening." [26] The familiar language of "return" is here and elsewhere linked with the readings' effect on several lower orders, especially the possessed, who share only "the scriptural teaching aimed at their return to better things." [27] Next, the scriptures confirm the progress of those returning to a "sacred mind," who may be the penitents.[28] It is unclear whether the passage's subsequent reference to a purification of those needing to be completely holy indicates yet another individual group or rather summarizes the purifying effect of the scriptures on all the inferior, "being-purified" orders. In any event, the text then moves on to the sacred people and provides the author's only reference to the readings' effect on those above the lowest orders. The sacred ones or lay people[29] are led by the scriptures "to the divine images with which they can enter into their vision and communion," terms which indicate the sacraments.[30] Next in hierarchical sequence would be the order of monks, and the text's references to oneness and unification do echo the author's discussion of the unified monks.[31]

The readings, therefore, are primarily aimed at the lower orders, purifying and instructing those who are dismissed thereafter. The effect of the lessons upon whose who remain is never emphasized. Their impact on the clerics is never even hinted and in the solitary text, discussed above, where the higher lay orders are mentioned, the role of the scriptural readings is strictly preparatory to the more exclusive, sacramental part of the service. At one point, after distinguishing the introductory and

[25] *ἐπιστροφὴν δὲ ἱερὰν*, EH 4 477A 1; see note 18 above.

[26] EH 6 532A 9f.

[27] *τῆς τῶν λογίων ἐπιστρεπτικῆς ἐπὶ τὰ κρείττω διδασκαλίας*, EH 3 436A 6f. This text supports a variant reading elsewhere in the corpus (*τῇ τῶν ἀγαθῶν λογίων ἐπιστρεπτικῇ διδασκαλίᾳ*), which concerns the effect of the scriptures on the "apostate life," most likely identical to the penitents (EH 6 532A 6-7).

[28] *εἰς νοῦν ἱερὸν*, EH 4 477A 10; see note 18 above. Yet the specific subdivisions of the lowest lay order are variously stated; see chapter three, nn. 57-67.

[29] Both the hierarchical sequence and the terminology used (*τοὺς δὲ ἱεροὺς*, EH 4 477A 14) suggest the order of the lay people; *ὁ ἱερὸς λαός*, EH 6 536D 44; 532C 32, 536C 28, EH 7 556C 30, Ep. 8 1089A 9.

[30] The expression *ἐποψία καὶ κοινωνία* (EH 4 477A 15) is especially associated with the synaxis: EH 3 425C 32, 436B 18; cf. EH 5 508A 6, 508B 25, EH 6 532C 34, 536D 42, EH 7 557C 39.

[31] *τὸ ἑνοειδὲς αὐτῶν τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ ἑνοποιοῦσαι*, EH 4 477B 17; cf. *ἑνοποιέω* in EH 6 533A 3 and 533D 47f., *ἑνιαίων μοναχῶν* in EH 6 536D 45.

pedagogical role of the scripture readings from the more exclusive sharing of communion, Dionysius remarks that he will now penetrate more deeply into the beauty of the synaxis, leaving "behind, as adequate for those who are uninitiated regarding contemplation, these signs which, as I have said, are splendidly depicted on the entrances to the inner sanctuary."[32] The things left behind are the preliminary teachings of the scriptures and of the dismissal itself which, like the departure of Judas from the upper room, teaches the uninitiated that the divine things are given in proportion to one's receptivity.[33]

But what does it mean that these introductory things are "depicted on the entrances of the inner sanctuary"? This language may be primarily metaphorical, for the main point is certainly a conceptual transition from certain introductory and external matters to the internal or deeper meaning of the synaxis. But might it also have a literal, architectural referent? According to his own passing references, the Areopagite's church did have a "clerical entrance" to an inner area, and there were certain "doors of the inner sanctuary" at which the monks could stand without actually entering.[34] Might there also have been some depictions near this entrance, some paintings or mosaics on the outside portions of these doors? Depictions of the angels, reminiscent of the Cherubim carved on the doors at the entrance of the inner sanctuary in the Temple (I Kings 6:31f.), were possible in a church building of the Pseudo-Areopagite's time and place.[35] Might such art work have included other pictorial representations, perhaps of the Last Supper? Perhaps both the scripture readings and certain visual representations aided the worshippers during the opening of the liturgy, whether as instruction for the lower orders

[32] *ἐπὶ τὰ τῶν ἀδύτων προπύλαια καλῶς διαγεγραμμένα*, EH 3 428C 27-29.

[33] EH 3 428B 21-26.

[34] Ep. 8 1088D 49f., cf. EH 3 425C 33, Ep. 8 1088B 27, 1088D 46 to 1089A 13. On the "clerical entrance," see EH 7 556C 32. The term *ἄδυτος*, usually in the neuter plural as a substantive, is used metaphorically by several Church Fathers and Neoplatonists. For example, *τῆς ἐν τοῖς ἀδύτοις ἱδρυμένης ἀληθείας ἀνακινοῦσιν τὴν ζήτησιν*, Proclus, *In Remp.* 1.85.26-30. See also Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.11.18. On the patristic side, Gregory of Nyssa used *ἄδυτα* to indicate the soul's inner chamber or private "Holy of Holies" (*Hom. 1 in Cant.*, PG 44: 1000D and 1149CD; *De vita Mos.* 164 and 167, PG 44: 377B and 377D). See J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (Paris: 1953), pp. 193-200. See also Basil, *In hexaem.*, PG 29: 28C; Gregory of Naz., *Or.* 40.6, PG 36: 380B.

[35] Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 83-150. Cyril A. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453. Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 32-44. Severus of Antioch, closely associated with the first appearance of the Dionysian corpus, is said to have argued that the robes of Michael should not be depicted as purple but as white (Mango, p. 44).

who were then dismissed, or as a spiritual preparation for those who remained and who, with the help of the author's interpretation of the sacraments, moved on to the loftier mysteries.

In any case, our author's understanding of the liturgy as a whole sums up his sacramental interpretation and his biblical hermeneutics, for he alludes to biblical books and the relationship between the testaments only in the context of this discussion of the readings of the scriptures in the liturgy. Furthermore, the sequence of first the readings and then a deeper, more exclusive rite mirrors the pedagogical order proposed above for the two hierarchical treatises. Although in itself the angelic hierarchy is certainly superior to the human, the biblical material discussed in *The Celestial Hierarchy* is like a scriptural reading in the liturgy in that it is introductory to the more advanced, sacramental realm discussed in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. This view of the sequence of the two hierarchical treatises can help explain the overall order of the Areopagite's works.

C. The Structural Unity of the Corpus

The reigning view of the Dionysian corpus and its literary structure attempts to divide it into two distinct sections. Jan Vanneste contrasted the individual ascent of the mind through the negative "theology" of *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology* with the hierarchically mediated "theurgy" of *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.[36] We have already seen that Dionysius himself used the terms "theology" and "theurgy" in very specific ways quite removed from Vanneste's general usage. More importantly, the argument advanced so far in these pages suggests a quite different approach to the overall shape of the corpus, for it can help identify a single sequence of treatises. We are here concerned not with the order of their actual composition, which remains shrouded in the larger enigma of the author's true identity, but with the sequence which he presented to the reader. The order indicated solely by the author's internal references to his other treatises, whether extant or not, has already been noted by René Roques. He presents the four principal books in this order: *The Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.[37] We here propose not a different order but rather an understanding of this same sequence which reflects both the formal references made by the author to

[36] See chapter one above, nn. 12-16.

[37] "Denys l'Aréopagite," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* ..., vol. 3, col. 257-264; *Structures*, pp. 132-134.

his other works and also the single argument which threads its way through them all.

Ronald Hathaway has already shown how the independent sequence of the ten letters is a conscious arrangement whose very order seems designed to make a point. In some respects the letters follow the pattern of procession and return. Far more striking is the ascending hierarchical sequence of their "recipients," except for the clear disruption of the letter to the monk Demophilus who himself disrupted proper hierarchical order. Thus the question of disorder in the hierarchy is addressed by both the contents of the eighth letter, which rebukes this Demophilus, and also by the place of its recipient in the overall sequence of recipients, which otherwise moves smoothly from monks up to hierarchs.[38]

Similarly, the larger Dionysian works show signs of a conscious arrangement which itself reinforces the argument they contain. The key to this arrangement is the third chapter of *The Mystical Theology*, the central and pivotal chapter not only of that brief treatise but also of the entire corpus. It first summarizes a preceding triad of treatises: "The Theological Representations," *The Divine Names*, and "The Symbolic Theology." [39] According to the author's description, the first concerned the scriptural doctrine of God, beginning with God's ineffable oneness and then proceeding to the trinitarian distinctions, the creation, and the incarnation. This work was mentioned and perhaps even summarized at the beginning of *The Divine Names*[40] which went on to consider the intelligible and bodiless names for God.[41] When *The Divine Names* concluded, it gave a preview of the next step "down" in this sequence, namely those names tied to symbols in the lower realm of sense perception.[42] These symbols are the explicit subject of "The Symbolic Theology," perhaps summarized in the Ninth Letter.[43] Thus these three works, all presented as inter-

[38] *Hierarchy*, pp. 65f. (See chapter one, n. 5).

[39] MT 3 1032D 1 to 1033B 22. Several other treatises, presumably less important, are not mentioned in this passage, even though *The Divine Names* presents them as already written. Roques includes them in the studies cited in note 37. The corpus does not really need any of these "lost" treatises, for it contains summaries of their salient points. It seems more likely that they were never written at all.

[40] DN 1 585B 10f., 589D 38 to 592A 17; cf. 593B 15f., DN 2 636C 16f., 640B 20-24, 644D 42 to 645A 5, DN 11 953B 17-20.

[41] Thomas Aquinas suggested that *The Divine Names* itself contains the sequence of "procession and return" in that it begins with the name of "good" and ends with the reuniting name of "one" (*In div. nom.* 4.1.261-265). Yet Proclus associates the name "one" with the procession and the name "good" with the return (*Th. Pl.* 2.6). See chapter nine below, n. 71.

[42] DN 9 912D 38 to 913B 23; cf. DN 1 597AB 5-23, DN 4 700C 32-38, DN 13 984A 11f.

[43] Ep. 9 1104B 8f., 1113BC 22-30; cf. CH 15 336A 3-5.

pretations of scripture, are arranged as three successive stages in the same direction, descending from transcendent ineffability down through the intelligible sphere to perceptible symbols. They proceed "down" into plurality regarding both their sequential subject matter and also their increasing length.[44] In its third chapter, *The Mystical Theology* presents the works which preceded itself as emphasizing a "kataphatic" or affirmative theology, a procession of assertions descending from divine oneness down to the lowliest perceptible symbols.

Next in the sequence is *The Mystical Theology* itself. But from here on, identification of a thematic continuity in the corpus becomes more difficult. After summarizing his treatises of "procession," the author might be expected to discuss the "return." This would seem to be the role of the ascending sequence of negations previewed in the third chapter of *The Mystical Theology* and then supplied in the fourth and fifth chapters. But the full picture is actually much more complex and includes the two remaining treatises, *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. *The Mystical Theology* must not be isolated from the two hierarchical treatises as some sort of private path of ascent over against a hierarchically mediated uplifting. Chapter six above argued that negative theology is incorporated into the interpretation of symbols. *The Mystical Theology* and *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter two, were presented as complementary. Chapter seven showed that the "return" and the "uplifting" interpretation of symbols were intricately intertwined and indeed part of the same process. Earlier in this chapter was discussed the formal and material continuity and progression from *The Celestial Hierarchy* to *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. These conclusions can now be brought together and applied to the question of the sequence of treatises.

The last three chapters of *The Mystical Theology* and the second chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy* should be understood together. The former treatise foresees an ascending sequence of negations, beginning with the lowest or most obviously false statements based on sense perception. The latter work is actually the beginning of this ascent, starting with the most "incongruous" of comparisons. *The Mystical Theology*'s fourth chapter regarding the negation of sense perception previews the interpretation of perceptible symbols which takes place in more detail in both *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. While the formal sequence of these last two works was clearly intended by the author, their thematic continuity is more subtle. The intervention of *The Celestial Hierarchy* between *The Mystical Theology* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is

[44] MT 3 1033B 22-26.

extremely important. *The Celestial Hierarchy* begins rather pedagogically, explaining the role of negative theology in the interpretation of incongruous biblical symbols. This type of interpretation is incorporated without fanfare into that work's concluding chapter and is then taken completely for granted in the subsequent essay, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. The negation of the perceptible gradually becomes a natural part of the interpretation of symbols, including the less incongruous symbols of the liturgy. As argued above, this ritual realm is less incongruous and "more immaterial" not only in its unwritten form but also in its emphasis upon liturgical movement and sequence rather than the material realm of the physical forms which are emphasized in the author's exegesis of the scriptures.

In the limited sense of a higher starting point, the liturgical symbols of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* could be said to represent a movement "above" the biblical symbols of *The Celestial Hierarchy* and thus a slightly higher stage of the "return." Yet both domains of symbols and both treatises are still in the first phase of the ascent, namely the negation of sense perception, as in chapter four of *The Mystical Theology*. All of these interpretations and all contemplations are still to be abandoned, for even the loftiest of intelligible conceptions must be negated in the further ascent described in *The Mystical Theology*, chapter five. The sequence of *The Mystical Theology*, chapters four and five, is also apparent in the following summary of the bipartite Dionysian elevation, taken from *The Divine Names*:

> But as for now, we use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upwards towards the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one. We leave behind us all our own notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and, to the extent that is proper, we consider the ray which transcends being.[45]

In the first stage of this elevation, that of the two hierarchical treatises and the fourth chapter of *The Mystical Theology*, symbols are negated in that they are interpreted correctly and yield intelligible truths to the receptive exegete and worshipper. In the second stage, that of the fifth chapter of *The Mystical Theology*, all such truths, even the hierarch's most sophisticated contemplations, are negated in that they are abandoned entirely. Lest the reader be tempted to linger over negations as capturing the divine, *The Mystical Theology* concludes by leaving even them behind

[45] DN 1 592C 40-47.

in the last approach to the ineffable. The plurality of words sharply decreases during the ascent from the many discursive interpretations to a few terse negations; then, in an even more dramatic constriction of expression, discourse abandons even negations and ends altogether. The treatise and the corpus have nothing more to say.

In this larger view, *The Mystical Theology* is not simply one component among others in a sequence; it is not a further stage in the procession and it is not one part or the whole of the return. It is rather a methodological parenthesis which surveys the entire corpus and enterprise. Certainly each Dionysian treatise has its own, individual agenda. But their overall pattern is clarified by *The Mystical Theology*. Its third chapter reviews the previous works and their discussion of the descending procession of affirmations. Its concluding chapters indicate the uplifting return yet to come in this literary and spiritual odyssey. The advice to "Timothy" and the example of Moses' ascent in chapter one show the way, but *The Mystical Theology* should not be taken as the whole of negative theology. It is rather the preview and guide of the "way up through negations," especially of the first stage of that ascent beyond perceptible symbols. In this treatise, the author is careful to put verbs in a past tense to refer back to the descending procession into plurality and to use the present and future tenses to look forward to the ascending return to ineffable simplicity:

> Then my argument travelled downward from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of the descent. But my argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with Him who is indescribable.[46]

While such references to temporal sequence may be helpful in understanding the rationale behind the Areopagite's order of treatises, they can also be extremely misleading. As discussed above, neither the Neoplatonic motif of procession and return nor the Areopagite's adaptation thereof is a simple temporal sequence. It would be a distortion to suggest that an affirming descent is simply followed by a negating ascent. These are rather complementary aspects of the same dynamic, separable only for emphasis and in a concession to the temporality of the

[46] *χακεῖ μὲν ... ηὐρύνετο. νῦν δὲ ... συστέλλεται ... ἔσται ... ἑνωθήσεται.* MT 3 1033C 30-36.

human thought process.[47] Dionysius made such a concession in his very attempt to describe this dynamic in sequential words, sentences, and works. It is only in the sense of a pedagogical accommodation that the treatises are presented as treating first procession and then return. This is not a division but an evolution of emphasis which guides the reader on a spiritual journey. The sense of spiritual guidance, especially "upward" in the last stages of the return, was preserved in the medieval mystics who honored Dionysius and appropriated his thought, however partially or mistakenly.

[47] Roques is therefore quite right that "procession and return" are present in every treatise. He is less persuasive in remarking that the sequence of works is from one point of view entirely a procession and from another, entirely a return (*Structures*, pp. 132-134). Granted, the author *could* have constructed a "return" motif from "The Symbolical Theology" up through *The Divine Names* to "The Theological Representations." Yet he did not do so but chose instead to place them in the descending sequence described above. For a briefer statement of this argument, see my article, "The Place of *The Mystical Theology* in the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus," *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 87-98.

9

Pseudo-Dionysian Mysticism

Only a full discussion of procession and return can provide the proper context for identifying a Pseudo-Dionysian "mysticism." Centuries of readers have had the general impression that the Areopagite's works concern a spiritual elevation of a mystical nature. The general source of this impression is the entire dynamic of "return," comprehending both the anagogical movement up to interpretations and also the abandonment of all such conceptions. A more specific identification of the "mystical" element in the Dionysian system is more difficult and can fail entirely if dependent upon a prior and anachronistic definition of mysticism in general.

The argument followed so far immediately presents a tempting hypothesis. As argued above, the uplifting movement begins with perceptible symbols and then, by incorporating the principle of negation into the practice of biblical and liturgical interpretation, moves on to their intelligible meanings. Next comes the negation or abandonment of these conceptions, no matter how lofty, in the final and silent ascent to the ineffable. In this argument, the use of negation as an essential part of the interpretive process is clearly distinguished from its subsequent use as a way of passing beyond all concepts. While this sequential distinction is helpful in understanding the different functions of negation in the Areopagite's method, specifically in the fourth and fifth chapters of *The Mystical Theology*, it would be extremely misleading to consider only the last moment in the overall ascent as "Dionysian mysticism." This final leap beyond the mind is indeed the climactic conclusion of the Pseudo-Dionysian pilgrimage. But his patient and careful discussion of the ascent prior to this pinnacle must not be overlooked. The fuller and more accurate picture is gained by starting with neither an assumed definition of mysticism nor the convenient classification of only the ascent's final phase as the Areopagite's "mysticism," but rather with the examples of

"mystics" in the text itself. Preceding chapters have discussed an upward movement in general theory and have thereby provided the context. Our consideration now turns to the texts which narrate the particular spiritual experiences of three enigmatic individuals: Hierotheus, Carpos and Moses.

A. Hierotheus and Carpos

Our Dionysius, whose autobiographical references are generally fictional but invariably illuminating, presents one "Hierotheus" as his "illustrious leader," after Paul himself.[1] The admiring pupil describes his mysterious mentor as well-versed in the scriptures, and more:

> My famous teacher has marvelously praised in his *Elements of Theology* whatever he learned directly from the sacred writers, whatever his own perspicacious and laborious research of the scriptures uncovered for him or whatever was made known to him through that more mysterious inspiration, not only learning but also experiencing the divine things. For he had a "sympathy" with such matters, if I may express it this way, and he was perfected in a mysterious union with them and in a faith in them which was independent of any education.[2]

Some things Hierotheus simply received from the scriptures, while others required a diligent investigation, just as the incongruous biblical descriptions of the angels prompted the Areopagite's own exegetical investigation.[3]

Beyond this biblical exegesis, however, is a "more mysterious inspiration," one here expressed in cultic language. Not that the reference to "initiation" ("whatever was made known to him") means some sort of rite such as baptism, for here as throughout the corpus the term means the sharing of the most exclusive religious contents, whether scriptural or liturgical.[4] Nor does the passage have direct ties to the terminology of the

[1] For this explicit identification (τοῦ κλεινοῦ καθηγεμόνος ἡμῶν Ἱεροθέου), see DN 3 681A 1-3. For other occurrences of the name Hierotheus, see DN 3 684D 41 and the subtitles in DN 2 648B 25, DN 3 680A 2, and DN 4 713A 6. See also "the illustrious leader" in CH 6 201A 7, EH 2 392A 17, EH 3 424C 6, DN 2 648A 11, and DN 3 681C 38. Paul's precedence over them both is invoked in DN 2 649D 39 and DN 7 865B 10. The role of this "Hierotheus," whether completely fictional or an allusion to Proclus, remains unclear. See I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Ps. Dionysius and the Holy Hierotheus," *Studia Patristica*, 8.2 (1966): 108-117.

[2] DN 2 648AB 10-20. On ἐπίπνοια, see chapter two, n. 51f.

[3] CH 2 145B 15-18; cf. CH 5 196B 5, CH 13 305A 9.

[4] Cf. CH 4 180C 40-42, 181B 12-14, CH 6 200C 14-16, EH 5 505A 1-3, DN 1 589D 38, and in a context similar to this passage, DN 1 592B 17-20. On μύησις, see chapter five, n. 6f.

author's explicitly liturgical texts in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Only the designation of Hierotheus as "perfected" might qualify in this respect, for it is often associated with becoming a communicant in the synaxis, although it certainly has other more general uses concerning the third and perfecting power.[5] The suggestion of a cultic experience comes rather from the unusual terminology: "not only learning but also experiencing the divine things [out of] a 'sympathy' with such matters ...." [6] The term "sympathy" represents a concept which was essential to the physical monism of Stoic cosmology and then to the theurgy of late Neoplatonism.[7] Theurgy, and forms of "sympathetic" magic up to modern cargo cults and rain dances, presupposed an intimate inter-relationship of all things, from the divine down to the material:

> Each god has his "sympathetic" representative in the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral world, which is, or contains, a *σύμβολον* of its divine cause and is thus *en rapport* with the latter.[8]

Yet this terminology does not appear when Dionysius speaks directly about the Christian liturgy, or indeed anywhere else in the corpus.[9] He seems almost apologetic about using the theurgical term "sympathy" for it is followed by the disclaimer he uses with certain of his terminological loans from non-Christian sources: "if I may express it this way." [10] Yet the Areopagite intends no crude manipulation of the divine by means of physical objects. The term "sympathy" is rather linked to "experiencing" (*παθών*), and together they indicate a personal rapport with the divine. This clause, "not only learning but also experiencing the divine things," goes

[5] *ἀποτελεσθεὶς*, DN 2 648B 20. Eucharistic uses: EH 2 400D 43f., EH 3 444C 32, 444D 44, EH 5 505D 45-47, 508A 5f., EH 7 553C 30. General uses: CH 3 165D 41, CH 7 209C 32, CH 8 240C 36, EH 5 505B 19-22, 509C 28, 516B 20, EH 7 565C 37, 568B 18, DN 8 897B 26, DN 10 936D 9f.

[6] *οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα κἀκ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὰ συμπαθείας*, DN 2 648B 17-19.

[7] Iamblichus, dM 3.16.137.20; 3.22.154.6 and 11; 3.27.164.7 (see also notes 130 and 156 by editor des Places). Proclus, "Concerning the Hieratic Art among the Greeks," ed. J. Bidez, *Cat. des Mss. Alchemiques Grec* 6 (1928): 148.5, 149.5, and 149.12.

[8] E. R. Dodds, "Theurgy," Appendix II of *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 292. See also "natural *συμπάθεια* linking image with original," p. 293. For a recent re-evaluation of the role of "sympathy" in Iamblichus, see Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 90-94.

[9] The verbal form used in Heb. 4:15 is quoted in Ep. 8 1096C 25f.

[10] *εἰ οὕτω χρὴ φάναι* DN 2 648B 19. In DN 2 645B 21, this same expression accompanies *ἄνθος*, a term prominent in The Chaldean Oracles (oracles 1, 34, 35, 37, 42, 49, 130; see note 66 by des Places). In DN 4 697B 14f., it appears again adjacent to the hapax legomenon *ἄψοφος*. The use of *μονή* to indicate the divine unity is also qualified by this disclaimer in DN 2 641A 12 (see chapter four above, n. 39).

back to an observation by Aristotle on the rituals of the mystery religions.[11] The cultic or ritualistic nature of Hierotheus' experience is specified in a similar expression found in a related passage where he is said to "experience communion with the things praised." [12] As we shall see, this expression is thoroughly eucharistic, and suggests that Hierotheus' special spiritual experience in the first text was also a liturgical experience. If so, it confirms the earlier observation that the sacramental realm is considered higher, in this case, "more divine," than biblical interpretation. Hierotheus received from the scriptures and searched them diligently; but beyond this instruction, he encountered a higher inspiration and experienced divine things in worship.

The second reference to Hierotheus, already invoked, poses quite directly the question of the relationship between "mystical" and liturgical experience.

> As you know, we and he and many of our holy brothers met together for a vision of that mortal body, that source of life, which bore God. James, the brother of God, was there. So too was Peter, that summit, that chief of all those who speak of God. After the vision, all these hierarchs chose, each as he was able, to praise the omnipotent goodness of that divine frailty. But next to the sacred writers themselves was my teacher. He surpassed all the divinely-rapt hierarchs, all the other sacred-initiators. He was so caught up, so taken out of himself, experiencing communion with the things praised, that everyone who heard him, everyone who saw him, everyone who knew him (or, rather, didn't know him) considered him to be inspired, to be speaking divine praises.[13]

The key issues here are the nature of this corporate gathering and the character of Hierotheus' personal experience.

Regarding the general setting of this narrative, the "divine frailty" praised by all the hierarchs seems to indicate the incarnation. This Christological praise is revealed as eucharistic in the expression "experiencing communion with the things praised." Not only is "communion" an occasional designation of the eucharist, but other passages also specify "the things praised" as the bread and the cup.[14] More enigmatic is the specific occasion of a eucharistic gathering said to be for

[11] Fragment 15 (Rose ed.) in W. Jaeger, *Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), p. 160.

[12] DN 3 681D 52f.; see the following note for the full context.

[13] DN 3 681C 41 to 684A 3.

[14] τὴν πρὸς τὰ ὑμνούμενα κοινωνίαν πάσχων, DN 3 681D 52f. On "communion" see EH 3 424C 14, 425A 3, EH 4 472D 7, and EH 5 505B 26. The term can also have more general uses, e.g. EH 2 404D 39-43 and EH 3 425A 1. Regarding "the things praised," see EH 3 425D 48-50, 440B 28, and 444A 5.

"a vision of that mortal body, that source of life, which bore God." The author of the *scholia* thought that this "body" concerned the dormition of the Virgin Mary, an interpretation later accepted into general tradition.[15] More recently, the "body" has been taken to mean Christ's eucharistic body, while the possibility of reading "tomb" for "body" has suggested to another scholar a service near the Holy Sepulchre.[16] In any case, the context is certainly liturgical and eucharistic. Yet the terminology is unusual, at least for Dionysius. Only in these two passages concerning Hierotheus does he use the verb "suffer" or "experience" (*πάσχω*) with the connotation of a higher, desirable experience. Otherwise it is never used for experiencing sacramental communion or anything positive at all, but indicates the negative "suffering" of delusions, unbelief, or loss.[17] In its designation of human weakness, it also applies to Jesus who "suffered" the incarnation and of course the passion.[18] Yet for Dionysius, a "passion" (*πάθος*) is never desirable but always "abominable" or "destructive." [19] Nevertheless, the cognate verbal form appears in these two passages in a positive sense, indeed to indicate an exalted state.

Thus the second issue in this narrative is its suggestion of Hierotheus' lofty experience. This suggestion does not depend upon the designation of Hierotheus and the others as "inspired" or, literally, "divinely-rapt," since the term, otherwise used only for scripture writers,[20] cannot carry such weight by itself. But Hierotheus, and he alone, is also described as "so caught up, so taken out of himself." [21] The former verb appears only here in the corpus, and its association with mystical rapture is extremely slight.[22] The latter is the subject of much debate over Pseudo-Dionysian

[15] The Dionysian text reads *ἐπὶ τὴν θέαν τοῦ ζωαρχικοῦ καὶ θεοδόχου σώματος* (DN 3 681C 44f.), which is explained in the *Scholia*: *τὸ τῆς ἁγίας Θεοτόκου* ..., PG 4: 236C. For the later tradition, see Andrew of Crete, PG 97: 1064f.

[16] M. Jugie, "La mort et l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge dans la tradition des cinq premiers siècles," *Echos d'Orient* 25 (1926): 305-307; George Every, "Pseudo-Dionysius," in *One Yet Two, Monastic Tradition East and West*, ed. M. Basil Pennington OCSO (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), p. 85f. Neither of these alternatives is entirely persuasive. Regarding the former, in patristic literature these two adjectives, "life-originating" and "God-bearing," never modified "eucharist" (and only rarely modified Mary), and the text speaks only of a viewing, not a participation. As for the latter suggestion to read *σήματος* for *σώματος*, the textual basis is extremely slight.

[17] CH 2 141B 21, CH 9 260C 35, DN 8 897B 19f.

[18] DN 2 644C 32, Ep. 8 1096B 19, 1100C 42; cf. DN 2 649A 1.

[19] EH 3 441B 29, 444B 20, EH 7 556A 5, DN 4 717A 7, DN 11 953A 6, MT 4 1040D 10, Ep. 8 1097A 5, Ep. 10 1117B 26.

[20] EH 2 396C 33f., EH 4 473A 9f., 485AB 15-21, DN 2 637A 5.

[21] *ὅλος ἐκδημῶν ὅλος ἐξιστάμενος ἑαυτοῦ*, DN 3 681D 50-52.

[22] The Cappadocians used the term to mean a departure from this life altogether: Gregory of Nazianzus, *ep.* 63 (PG 37: 124B), Gregory of Nyssa, *ep.* 2 (PG 46: 1013C).

"ecstasy" and his mysticism in general. It is the permanent value of Jan Vanneste's work that the "ecstatic" mysticism of the Middle Ages may never again be simply read back into this terminology in Pseudo-Dionysius.[23] The Areopagite himself did not understand the notion of ἔκστασις to mean a private, emotional, and supra-rational experience. As usual, the basis for his terminology is a literal definition: standing outside oneself, as in being drunkenly out of one's wits.[24] The inebriated "ecstasy" ascribed to God in the Bible signifies the divine transcendence,[25] and his becoming outside himself in a loving and creative excess of goodness.[26] The divine ecstasy concerns God's "going outside himself" toward humanity, namely his procession down to the created human realm of sense perception.

As applied to humans, the word family of "ecstasy" is often associated with a special cognitive process:

> And this transcending characteristic must be given to the words we use about God. They must not be given the human sense. We should be taken wholly out of ourselves and become wholly of God, since it is better to belong to God rather than to ourselves.[27]

Those who are set outside themselves are freed from wandering amid plurality and variegation, and are united to the simple truth.[28] This type of cognitive "ecstasy" is clearly related to the process of biblical and liturgical interpretation. In fact it is precisely the negative ascent in such interpretation which yields the soul's "ecstasy," namely being put outside itself.

> The scripture writers' preference is for the way up through negations, since this stands the soul outside everything which is correlative with its own finite nature. Such a way guides the soul through all the divine notions, notions which are themselves transcended by that which is far beyond every name, all reason and all knowledge.[29]

[23] J. Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu*, pp. 206-217.

[24] Ep. 9 1112c 28.

[25] Ep. 9 1112c 32 and 36.

[26] ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται, DN 4 712A 15; ἐκστατικός, DN 4 712A 1 and 7, 712B 19. See also the reference to Paul in this passage, 712A 10. But God does not stand outside of his own sameness, DN 11 952A 12.

[27] *κατὰ ταύτην οὖν τὰ θεῖα νοητέον οὐ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἀλλ' ὅλους ἑαυτοὺς ὅλων ἑαυτῶν ἐξισταμένους καὶ ὅλους θεοῦ γιγνομένους*, DN 7 865D 33 to 868A 1. The cognitive side of Pseudo-Dionysian ecstasy is discussed by Völker, *Kontemplation und Ekstase*, pp. 200-217.

[28] DN 7 872D 45 to 873A 13.

[29] ὡς ἐξιστῶσαν τὴν ψυχὴν τῶν ἑαυτῇ συμφύλων, DN 13 981B 16-20.

This movement outside oneself is portrayed not as an emotional experience, but as a cognitive process intimately tied to the anagogical interpretation of the scriptural and liturgical realms. In its apophatic ascent the soul leaves behind or is "set outside" of perceptible things and even, eventually, the conceptual realm. In summary, the divine "ecstasy" takes place in procession, the human in return.[30]

Regarding the experience of Hierotheus, we can now note how closely the text juxtaposes "ecstasy" and eucharist: "so caught up, so taken out of himself, experiencing communion with the things praised." Hierotheus not only learned but also experienced the divine things, and did so in a eucharistic context. Yet the unusual terminology, to "experience" communion, suggests that this apparent identification of a "mystical" experience as also a liturgical one is not necessarily normative for the eucharistic gatherings described elsewhere in the corpus. With this reservation in mind, we turn to the strange story of Carpos and his midnight vision of heaven above and hell below.

Whatever our author's ultimate purpose in echoing both Bishop Nilus' story of Carpos and also Socrates' eschatological tale in the *Gorgias*,[31] he provides in passing the example of a necessary connection between the liturgy and the supernatural experience of a special sight. Carpos is described as "receptive" toward the sight of God and he never celebrated the sacraments unless a propitious vision appeared to him during the preparatory prayers.[32] This notion of receptivity (ἐπιτηδειότης) comes from the Neoplatonic understanding of a medium's reception or general fitness for participation in a higher realm.[33] For Dionysius, the term can be used literally, and in metaphysical and liturgical contexts in general.[34] More specifically, the deacon makes the worshippers "receptive toward the ritual vision and communion" of the synaxis.[35] In the case of the "receptive" Carpos, an extraordinary vision seemed the necessary condition for a liturgical function. This is not to say that Dionysius

[30] See also Roques, "Symbolisme et théologie négative," *Structures*, p. 179.

[31] The Eighth Letter, 1097B 18 to 1100D 48. Nilus, *Epistles* Vol. 2, no. 190 (PG 79: 297D to 300C); Plato, *Gorgias* 522e4 to 524b1. Ronald Hathaway considers this latter source and its significance in *Hierarchy*, pp. 93-99.

[32] Ep. 8 1097B 21-26.

[33] For a compact and useful sketch of this term and the literature on it, see S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 37f., notes 51-53.

[34] Literally: CH 2 137A 11, DN 2 644C 27; in the context of metaphysics: DN 1 593D 51, DN 4 700B 23, 720A 9, DN 9 912C 28, DN 9 917A 8, Ep. 8 1092B 19; in the context of the liturgy in general: EH 2 392A 13 (see the similarity to Iamblichus in dM 3.2.105.1f.), EH 2 393A 9, EH 3 429D 43, DN 3 680B 15, and regarding biblical interpretation, Ep. 9 1105C 44.

[35] EH 5 508A 6; cf. Ep. 8 1085D 48f.

considered the kind of bizarre and fantastic spectacle which Carpos related as a normal part of the liturgical experience of others. On the contrary, the terminology used for what Carpos saw appears in no other liturgical context. While Pseudo-Dionysian worshippers usually enjoy the "vision and communion" of the synaxis,[36] Carpos was receptive toward the "sight of God," something shared by no other human in the Dionysian corpus except the worthy Moses,[37] and a type of "vision" usually associated with biblical visions like that of Isaiah, but not with the liturgy.[38]

Beyond the example of Hierotheus, the story of Carpos makes a stronger, even necessary connection between a supernatural experience and Christian worship. But here too, as in the texts concerning Hierotheus, the vocabulary is not entirely that of the normal liturgical context. Conversely, the direct treatment of the liturgy in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* includes no mention of any such supernatural experiences nor even, as discussed above, an acknowledgment of the final negative moment in which all concepts and interpretations are left behind. While the terminological picture is complex, the corpus is not entirely inconsistent. Regarding both Hierotheus and Carpos, it is the language of Neoplatonism ("sympathy" and "receptiveness") which is injected into the framework of the Christian liturgy. Hierotheus elsewhere represents the author's Neoplatonic ancestry,[39] but he has here become the central figure in the ecclesiastical context of the synaxis. Perhaps the stories of Hierotheus and Carpos are expressed partially in the language of Neoplatonic religious experience and partially in the language of Christian eucharistic experience in order to exemplify their basic compatibility.[40] Full comprehension of these narratives and especially of the key figure of Hierotheus may not be possible without a complete account of our author's historical identity and context. But the relationship of these "mystical" experiences to a liturgical milieu is extremely suggestive. Not that the liturgical events themselves produce extraordinary effects or experiences. Rather, as indicated by the cognitive side of Pseudo-

[36] *ἐποψία καὶ κοινωνία*, EH 3 425C 32, 436B 18; cf. EH 5 508A 6, 508B 25, EH 6 532C 34, 536D 42, EH 7 557C 39.

[37] *θεοπτεία*, Ep. 8 1085A 5-7; the *θεοπτία* in EH 4 481B 21 and EH 6 537B 20 is an angelic privilege.

[38] *ὅρασις*: CH 4 180B 26, 180C 34-41, CH 8 241C 38, CH 9 261B 19-21, DN 1 596A 4, DN 9 912D 40; Isaiah: CH 13 300C 25, 304B 21, 305A 13.

[39] For example, the three triads of the angels in CH 6 200D 17-20.

[40] In the case of Hierotheus, Vanneste is correct to hear a "faint echo of the original Neoplatonic heritage," but this is only a partial analysis. "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1963): 304.

Dionysian "ecstasy," the anagogical interpretation of these events constitutes an essential phase in the spiritual elevation to the divine. The suggestion of a close relationship between these accounts of "mystical" experiences and the liturgy should be tested against the classic Dionysian example in this respect, the experience of Moses in the first chapter of *The Mystical Theology*.

B. Moses

The Mystical Theology begins by giving Timothy, the purported reader, some advice which previews the rest of the treatise and especially the example of Moses. Timothy is encouraged to abandon the activities of sense perception and of the mind and to rise up to union with the one who is beyond all knowledge.

> By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is.[41]

Here again, Dionysian "ecstasy" is specified as an uplifting beyond the perceptible and the intelligible, the very process identified elsewhere as, in part, the anagogical interpretation of perceptible symbols. This advice is reinforced by the example of Moses' ascent up Mt. Sinai:

> It is not for nothing that the blessed Moses is commanded to submit first to purification and then to depart from those who have not undergone this. When every purification is complete, he hears the many-voiced trumpets. He sees the many lights, pure and with rays streaming abundantly. Then, standing apart from the crowds and accompanied by chosen priests, he pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents. And yet he does not meet God Himself, but contemplates, not Him Who is invisible, but rather where He dwells. ... But then Moses breaks free of them, away from what sees and is seen, and he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. Here, renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to Him who is beyond everything. Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.[42]

[41] τῇ ... ἐκστάσει ... ἀναχθήσῃ. MT 1 997B 22 to 1000A 3.

[42] MT 1 1000CD 34-43, 1001A 3-11. Moses' ascent also figures prominently in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis*. Here, too, patristic mysticism is being re-evaluated. Ronald E. Heine has concluded, *contra* Daniélou and others, that the primary concern of that treatment of Moses is not "mysticism" but spiritual progress in general. *Perfection in the Virtuous Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975).

The unmistakably sequential nature of this narrative combines the framework of Moses' biblical ascent with several Dionysian themes. The order of ostensibly historical moments becomes the paradigm for a sequence of spiritual events or stages. First of all, Moses is purified. The same terminology is frequently used to indicate the first of the three powers: purification, illumination, and perfection.[43] At first glance, the rest of the familiar triad of powers does not seem to apply to Moses. Vanneste, for example, concedes that the final, perfecting power is represented by Moses' final union, but he insists that the middle power of illumination is absent.[44] On the contrary, the notion of illumination is closely tied to that of contemplation, as when the middle order of lay people is called the "contemplative" order assigned to the priests for illumination.[45] In between his purification and the final union, Moses is said to "contemplate" the place where God was, thus completing the triad.

Yet there is even more to this complex text than an historical sequence and some allusions to the three powers. Moses is a Dionysian prototype, not for the faithful in general but for the hierarch in particular.[46] His initial purification echoes not only the general purification of all believers but also the specific terminology used for the washing of the hands by the hierarch and the priests in the synaxis.[47] Next, Moses is "separated" from those who are not purified, exactly as those yet being purified are liturgically dismissed and "separated" from the hierarch.[48] Moses then moves beyond the trumpet sounds and the many lights, just as the hierarch knows how to transcend the bare sounds of the scriptures and the material lights of worship.[49] With the "chosen" priests, Moses is again separated from the larger group, just as the hierarch, with the priests and

[43] EH 5 504B 12, 508A 4, 508B 19, 508D 48f., 516B 18f., EH 6 532C 37, 537B 18. The term can also refer to specific cases of purification such as baptism (EH 2 397B 14 and 20f., EH 6 536B 14f.), the scripture readings (EH 3 428B 16, EH 4 477A 13), and the angels' purification from ignorance (CH 7 209C 36 and EH 6 537B 25).

[44] "La doctrine des trois voies dans la *Théologie Mystique* du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Studia Patristica* vol. 8, Part 2 (Texte und Untersuchungen 93), (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), pp. 462-467. That "union" and "perfection" are both part of the third power has been clearly argued by Roques, *L'Univers*, p. 95.

[45] EH 6 532B 20-22; see also EH 5 504B 17f. and *θεωρητικὴ δὲ τάξις ὁ ἱερὸς λαός*, EH 6 536D 43.

[46] EH 5 501C 32-34.

[47] *μετὰ πᾶσαν ἀποκάθαρσιν*, MT 1 1000C 37; *νῦν δὲ τοῦ ἱεράρχου καὶ τῶν ἱερέων ἡ τῶν χειρῶν ἀποκάθαρσις*, EH 3 440A 11-15.

[48] *τῶν μὴ τοιούτων ἀφορισθῆναι*, MT 1 1000C 36f.; *ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ λειτουργοῦ διακριτικῆς φωνῆς ἀφοριζέσθωσαν*, EH 3 436A 3-5.

[49] MT 1 1000CD 37-39. Cf. *πάντα θεῖα φῶτα καὶ ἤχους*, MT 1 1000C 31f.; *ἤχους φιλούς*, DN 4 708C 28, cf. *ἱστορίαν ψιλήν*, Ep. 9 1108C 30; *τὰ ὑλικὰ φῶτα*, CH 1 121D 42f.

the "chosen" deacons, enters where the lay people are not permitted and approaches the altar.[50] Surely these "divine ascents" of Moses are not unrelated to the only other occurrence of that term, the "sacred ascents" of liturgical interpretation.[51] Moses has not yet met God, but contemplates the place where He is, just as the hierarch contemplates the entire context and content of the liturgy for its higher meaning. Yet the things seen and conceived must be transcended as foundational,[52] just as even the hierarch's most sublime contemplation is not the final goal. In the end, all conceptions are left behind in the last approach "into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing."

This last reference to unknowing reminds us of the obvious sequential relationship between anagogical interpretation and that final moment of the Dionysian ascent when all interpretations are left behind. But the thematic and terminological similarities between the prior stages of Moses' ascent and the hierarch's liturgical experience are too numerous to dismiss. Judging from the examples of Hierotheus, Carpos, and especially Moses, Pseudo-Dionysian "mysticism" is intimately related to the liturgy. Anagogical interpretation and all but the final moment of the mystical ascent are one and the same uplifting journey. That final transcending moment, furthermore, builds on and presupposes the entire preceding elevation and indeed the full pattern of procession and return.

C. Implications for Medieval Studies

The argument that Dionysian mysticism is inextricably intertwined with the interpretation of the Bible and especially of the liturgy has many implications, some of them pertinent to medieval studies. A full account of the medieval use of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings is a task perhaps beyond the reach of any one scholar. Such a work would necessarily pursue the relative influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, East and West, as compared with other Fathers and Neoplatonists. A more modest goal would be a survey of the medieval Latin texts which explicitly call on the Areopagite's thought.[53] It is toward this goal, still enormous, that the

[50] *κατὰ τῶν ἐκκρίτων ἱερέων*, MT 1 1000D 40; *μετὰ τῶν ἱερέων οἱ τῶν λειτουργῶν ἔκκριτοι*, EH 3 425D 44-46.

[51] *τῶν θείων ἀναβάσεων*, MT 1 1000D 41; *ἀναβάσεσιν ἱεραῖς*, EH 2 397C 27-30; cf. DN 5 821B 16f., DN 11 949C 43-45, and MT 1 1000C 30f.

[52] MT 1 1000D 44 to 1001A 3. Regarding *ὑποθετικοὺς ... λόγους*, see MT 3 1033C 40f., and Iamblichus, dM 5.18.225.9 (cited above in chapter seven, note 50).

[53] A reliable guide to some of the secondary literature on this topic is provided by Barbara Faes de Mottoni, *Il "Corpus Dionysianum" nel Medioevo, Rassegna di studi: 1900-1972* (Rome: Societá Editrice Il Mulino, 1977).

following observations are offered. If there is indeed a rough synthesis of Neoplatonic metaphysics, biblical exegesis, liturgical interpretation and "mysticism" in the Areopagite's work, a different light is then cast on certain medieval uses of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus in the West. To borrow an image from Boethius, roughly and strikingly the Areopagite's contemporary, medieval admirers often ripped patches from the robe of Dionysian philosophy and then mistook their fragment for the whole.

We begin with several medieval authors generally labeled mystics: the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Eckhart, Suso, and Bonaventure.[54] As we have seen, the full Dionysian theme of elevation includes the anagogical interpretation of symbols. Yet many who later honored Denys as a prototypical mystic were more interested in how he abandoned concepts and interpretations than in how he attained them. For example, the fourteenth-century *Cloud of Unknowing* takes its title from the Dionysian interpretation of Moses' final ascent into the cloud on Mt. Sinai, called in *The Mystical Theology* "the darkness of unknowing." The work itself does treat preparatory matters such as humility and indeed many non-Dionysian themes. Yet it invokes the Areopagite, and makes an exaggerated claim to his authority for the entire treatise, by citing only the concept of unknowing. "That is why St. Dionysius said, 'the most godlike knowledge of God is that which is known by unknowing.' "[55] Meister Eckhart also cited the Areopagite as an authority in several areas, notably the nature of the angels and the transcendence of God, who is beyond being and life and light.[56] Eckhart cares little for the Areopagite's inter-

[54] Erich Vogelsang's categories of German, Roman, and Dionysian mysticism ("Luther und die Mystik," *Luther-Jahrbuch* 19 [1937]: 32-54) illustrate the difficulties in classifying medieval mystics. Bonaventure, for example, is there considered part of "romanische Mystik" even though he employs Dionysian negative theology.

[55] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. 70, ed. Phyllis Hodgson, Early English Text Society, 218 (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 125. The modern English version quoted is that of Clifton Wolters, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 145. The Dionysian quotation is from *The Divine Names*, DN 7 872A 14f. See also the reference to the Areopagite's "unknowing knowing" in the same author's *Book of Privy Counselling* (Hodgson, EETS 218, p. 154). The terminological shift from the Dionysian "darkness of unknowing" (τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας, MT 1 1001A 4f.) to the English "cloud of unknowing" was partly an echo of the biblical account of Moses' ascent and partly a debt to Richard of St. Victor: "nubes ignorantiae," *Benjamin Major* lib. 1, cap. 22 (PL 196: 165C); *The Mystical Ark, Benjamin Major*, tr. Grover A. Zinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 303. The most recent editor of *The Cloud of Unknowing* discounts "any *direct* influence of the authentic teaching of the *Mystica Theologia* of the Pseudo-Denis in *The Cloud*" (emphasis original), James Walsh, SJ, editor, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 51.

[56] Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen Werke* 3, ed. J. Quint (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1976), p. 223. (To be cited as *DW*.) The allusion is to MT 5 1048A 4f.

pretation of symbols but calls on him to confirm that God is beyond all interpretations and that those who wish to speak of him are wrong while those who wish not to speak of him are right.[57] Eckhart was not above confusing the thought of Augustine with that of Dionysius, as when he ascribed a single quotation once to each author.[58] Thus when he credits the Bishop of Hippo with the idea that what one affirms of God is not true while what one denies of God is true, the reader should also consider the Areopagite as a possible source.[59] Eckhart's editors rightly wonder where this might be found in Augustine, but fail to note the striking parallel in Dionysius. Eckhart's follower Henry Suso also took little interest in the Areopagite's movement from symbols to their meanings, but noted with care the Dionysian leap beyond all intelligible things.[60] Even while claiming fidelity to Dionysius, these authors reduced the "return" to only its final moment, and ignored entirely the system's counter-weight, the "procession."

Not that the Areopagite's views on the interpretation of perceptible symbols were unknown in the Middle Ages. Bonaventure, for example, generally identified Dionysius with the negative way;[61] he used the opening of *The Mystical Theology* to close one of his own most important works with reference to the final moment when all conceptions are abandoned.[62] Yet he was also aware of the Dionysian insistence on the sacred veils of the divine ray as the only means of ascent.[63] While most mystics largely ignored the role of the symbolic veils in the Dionysian synthesis, other authors put it to good use within their own agenda, notably Abbot Suger of St. Denys. Suger's account of the new church at

[57] *DW* 3: 265; *Die lateinischen Werke* 2: 196.8-15; *DW* 1: 347.

[58] *DW* 5: 292; see DW 5: 368, note 410.

[59] *DW* 1: 330; the parallel in Dionysius is CH 2 141A 3f.

[60] Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. K. Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1907), 190.5-14, 328.24 to 329.8, and 342.15-18.

[61] The following references are to *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae opera omnia*, edita studio et cura pp. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, 10 vols. (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventura, 1882-1902). "Sed alia est eminentior, scilicet secundum viam negativam, quoniam, ut dicit Dionysius, 'affirmationes incompactae sunt, negationes verae,' " *De triplici via* 3.13 (8: 17, citing CH 2 141A 3f.; cf. 5: 341f.).

[62] *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 7.5 (5: 313, citing MT 1 997A 7 to 1000A 3).

[63] "... et hoc est in Ecclesia per symbola; quia 'aliter non est possibile, nobis lucere divinum radium, nisi varietate sacrorum velaminum anagogice circumvelatum,' secundum Dionysium," *In Hexaëmeron Collatio* 20.14 (5: 427f.). This Dionysian text (CH 1 121B 23-26) is quoted in 5: 575; 9: 192; 9: 667; and, with a variation, 3: 777. See also Grover A. Zinn, Jr., "Book and Word, The Victorine Background of Bonaventure's Use of Symbols," in *S. Bonaventura 1274-1974*, 2: *Studia di vita, mente, fontibus et operibus Sancti Bonaventurae* (Rome: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1973), pp. 143-169.

the (now Parisian) abbey of St. Denys quite directly involved the writings of the abbey's patron saint and supposed founder, our own Dionysius. When the Carolingian era sealed the mistaken identification of Denis the martyred Apostle to France with Dionysius the biblical convert from Athens, the Pseudo-Areopagite's writings entered French history with an impact their author never dreamed. Suger's primary authority for the "uplifting" effect of the building's luminous beauty was the Dionysian tradition. Ironically, any discussion of the origins of Gothic architecture, the most concrete and visible legacy of the medieval church, must include the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, perhaps the most evasive and shadowy figure of the early church. The symbols which Suger produced and then interpreted included more than liturgical events and depictions of biblical scenes, although these figured prominently in the dedication ceremonies and the stained glass. Suger's focus was on the sheer physical beauty of the doors, the precious stones, the soaring arches, and especially the light of the stained-glass windows, for these all lifted the spirit up through the material to the immaterial.[64] Although the intervening centuries of Dionysian translations and theological aesthetics must also be considered, especially the work of John the Scot and Hugh of St. Victor,[65] this rationale for ecclesiastical beauty is decidedly Dionysian. Yet it too is a narrow and selective use of the Areopagite. As a counterpart to the mystics' neglect of the Dionysian interpretation of symbols, Suger avoided

[64] "... de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo, ... ab hoc etiam inferiori ad illam superiorem anagogico more Deo donante posse transferri ..." Abbot Suger, *On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its Art Treasures*, edited, translated, and annotated by Erwin Panofsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 62-64. For an updated bibliography, see the second edition by Gerda Panofsky-Soergal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[65] Panofsky's work, which emphasized Eriugena as the link between Dionysius and Suger, was immediately amplified by the consideration of Hugh of St. Victor in Otto von Simson's *The Gothic Cathedral, Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 52f.; and 103-141. Two recent studies on Suger and the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition further specify the roles of Eriugena and Hugh, respectively: Werner Beierwaltes, "Negati Affirmatio or the World as Metaphor. A foundation for medieval aesthetics from the writings of John Scotus Eriugena," *Dionysius* 1 (1977): 127-159, a slightly expanded English translation of his " 'Negati affirmatio': Welt als Metapher, Zur Grundlegung einer mittelalterlichen Aesthetik," in *Jean Scot Érigène et l'histoire de la philosophie*, ed. R. Roques (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1977), pp. 263-275; and Grover A. Zinn, Jr., "Suger, Theology, and the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition" (as yet unpublished). For the most recent work on the Abbey itself under Suger, see *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis in the Time of Abbot Suger (1122-1151)*, exhibition catalog edited by Sumner McKnight Crosby (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981).

entirely the final inadequacy of all material symbols and their every immaterial interpretation, no matter how lofty.

Of course, not all of the Areopagite's legacy was so piecemeal. His decisive arrival in western thought included an application of *exitus-reditus* to all of cosmic history in the massive mind and influential works of John the Scot (Eriugena). While Dionysius himself maintained the Neoplatonic tension of a timeless and ahistorical motion, his Carolingian translator and interpreter, adapting the Areopagite's themes from Maximus the Confessor, saw procession and return in the entire "history" of God and the world. It seems that he began with the human microcosm of the mind's dialectical process: a problem is divided or broken down into its components in order to be analyzed and then re-assembled. A basic study on Eriugena persuasively argues for a bridge from dialectics to metaphysical theology, and then presents the Scot's thought under the subheadings "La théologie descendente: La Processio ou Creatio" and "La théologie ascendente: La Reversio ou Deificatio." [66] Other scholars have also noted that Eriugena's comprehensive work, *Periphyseon*, has a literary structure based on this same theme. God's initial creative procession into plurality is balanced by the final cosmic return of all things back to God.[67] The fascinating afterlife of this universal "meta-history" embraced centuries of medieval thought, despite the condemnation of Eriugena, and burst into modern significance in the works of Hegel and then Marx. While Dionysius did something similar with "procession and return" in the structure of his overall corpus, the fateful transposition of this refrain into an historical and eschatological key is Eriugena's own contribution to western thought. In suggesting that procession and return were nature and grace, respectively,[68] John also married the Dionysian and Augustinian terminologies and begot a most fertile family of medieval theologians.

One of them in particular seems to have continued the Scot's use of Dionysian "procession and return" as a literary structure. As often noted, Thomas Aquinas cited the Areopagite's works several thousand times,

[66] Dom Maieul Cappuyns, OSB, *Jean Scot Érigène, sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée* (reprt: Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1969), pp. 302-380.

[67] "Beginning with Book II, the fourfold scheme of nature's division is fully assimilated to the dialectic of procession and return." Donald F. Duclow, "Dialectic and Christology in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 102.

[68] *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*, cap. 1, edited by J. Barbet, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 31 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1975), pp. 1-6. See I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "Eriugena's Interpretation of the ps. Dionysius," *Studia Patristica* vol. 12, part 1 (Texte und Untersuchungen, 115), (1975), p. 154.

regarding a wide range of issues. Noted less often is the *exitus-reditus* structure of his own *Summa theologiae*. The three parts concern, respectively, God and the procession of creatures from him, the movement of rational creatures back to God, and Christ as the way back to God.[69] Thomas had already interpreted the order of Boethius' theological tractates in the same way: first God and the trinity, second the procession of creatures from God, and third their return through Christ.[70] While the relative influence of Boethius over against Dionysius on the organizing principle of Thomas' *Summa theologiae* is still to be evaluated, the same Neoplatonic tradition is behind them both. Although Thomas did not perceive the structure of "procession and return" in the overall order of the Dionysian treatises, he did argue that the Areopagite's *Divine Names* purposefully begins with the name of the proceeding "good" and ends with the final names of "perfect" and "one." [71] Perhaps because he

[69] "primo tractabimus de Deo, secundo de motu rationalis creaturae in Deum, tertio de Christo, qui secundum quod homo via est nobis tendendi in Deum. Consideratio autem de Deo tripartita erit: ... tertio ea quae pertinent ad processum creaturarum ab ipso." *Summa theologiae* 1a, q. 2, prol. See M.-D. Chenu, OP, "Le plan de la Somme théologique de S. Thomas," *Revue Thomiste* 45 (1939): 93-107; and Ceslai Pera, "Le fonti del pensiero di S. Tommaso d'Aquino nella Somma Teologica," *La Somma Teologica: Introduzione generale* (Florence, 1949). "The 'exitus-reditus' form is found at all levels of his *Summa*," Wayne Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle: Being or Unity?" *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 169.

[70] "Eius namque doctrina in tres partes dividitur. Prima namque est de trinitate personarum, ex quarum processione omnis alia nativitas vel processio derivatur, in hoc quidem libro, qui prae manibus habetur, quantum ad id quod de trinitate et unitate sciendum est, in alio vero libro, quem ad Iohannem diaconum ecclesiae Romanae scribit, de modo praedicandi, quo utimur in personarum trinitate, qui sic incipit: 'Quaero, an pater.' Secunda vero pars est de processione bonarum creaturarum a deo bono in libro, qui ad eundem Iohannem conscribitur *De hebdomadibus*, qui sic incipit: 'Postulas a me.' Tertia vero pars est de reparatione creaturarum per Christum. Quae quidem in duo dividitur. Primo namque proponitur fides, quam Christus docuit qua iustificamur, in libro qui intitulatur *De fide Christiana*, qui sic incipit: 'Christianam fidem.' Secundo explanatur, quid de Christo sentiendum sit, quomodo scilicet duae naturae in una persona conveniant, et hoc in libro *De duabus naturis in una persona Christi* ad Iohannem praedictum conscripto, qui sic incipit: 'Anxie te quidem.' " *Expositio super librum Boethii De Trinitate*, prol. 4, ed. Bruno Decker (Leiden: Brill, 1955), p. 47. Robert Crouse, " 'Semina Rationum': St. Augustine and Boethius," *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 82. See also W. J. Hankey, "The *de Trinitate* of St. Boethius and the Structure of the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Atti del Congresso Internationale di Studi Boeziani* (Pavia, October 5-8, 1980), ed. Luca Obertello (Rome: Herder, 1981): 367-375.

[71] "... quod sicut in 1 et 2 capp. dictum est, in hoc libro intendit exponere divina nomina, quibus manifestantur processiones Dei in creaturas. Principium autem commune omnium harum processionum, bonum est, ut in 3 cap. dictum est: quia quidquid a Deo in creaturas procedit, hoc creaturae suae propter suam bonitatem communicat. Et ideo primo agit in hoc 4 cap. de bono, et etiam de his quae ad considerationem boni pertinent. ... Sed circa ordinem rerum in finem duo sunt consideranda: scilicet providentia gubernantis et ordinantis in finem, et de hoc agitur in duodecimo capitulo, ubi agitur de

appreciated the fuller structure of procession and return, Thomas, unlike the mystics discussed above, repeated the Dionysian affirmation of the need for "veils" in the divine revelation.[72] He also avoided the simple isolation of negative theology, preferring to note its inter-dependence with affirmative theology as a unified method.[73] Thus it seems that Thomas was less inclined than others to detach one or two Dionysian themes from their context.

In general, however, new lines of inquiry into the Western medieval use of the Areopagite's corpus could be opened by asking which parts of the Dionysian writings are cited, how did they fit into his overall structure, and, finally, *why* did the author in question focus on that particular portion of the Dionysian corpus.

D. Conclusion

An investigation into the Pseudo-Dionysian views of the Bible and the liturgy quickly leads into the wider framework of his thought. Parts of this argument, as detailed above, represent new emphases in the interpretation of the Areopagite's writings. A somewhat different perspective on the relationship of this author to prior Neoplatonists and theologians is therefore possible, but has not been seriously pursued in these pages. One might ask, for example, whether our Dionysius started with an Alexandrian tradition of "anagogy" in biblical hermeneutics and then extended it to liturgical interpretation, or rather expanded a modified Iamblichean tradition of anagogical ritual to encompass the literary symbols of the Bible. Both possibilities could be defended, the former from a general impression of the Areopagite's primary Christian sympathies and secondary Neoplatonic borrowings, the latter from the more specific observation that he occasionally applied liturgical terms and concepts to other contexts. But the hard, internal evidence is slim. It seems more likely, and not the least of his synthetic achievements, that this theologian and philosopher knew and adapted both traditions, forming one seamless anagogical method in the interpretation of all symbols.

Rege Regum, et Domino dominorum; et ipse finis, ad quem res per providentiam et gubernationem perveniunt; et hoc pertinet ad decimumtertium capitulum, in quo agitur de perfecto et uno." *In de div. nom.* 4.1.261 and 265 (Parma 15: 295). See Wayne Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle: Being or Unity?" *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 158.

[72] *Summa theologiae* 1a. 1.9; 2a2ae. 174.2 ad 4.

[73] "Ad secundum dicendum, quod ita Dionysius dicit negationes horum nominum esse veras de Deo quod tamen non asserit affirmationes esse falses sed incompactas; ..." *Quaestiones disputatae: de Potentia* 1.5 ad 2 (Parma 8: 162).

As for the texts in themselves, the emphasis throughout this study has been on the formal or methodological concerns in the Dionysian writings. The actual contents of his exegetical passages and sacramental interpretations have been given scant attention and even then only as illustrations of his method. Yet this emphasis has a foundation in the corpus itself, where methodological matters abound. We recall the path of procession and return as traced by the various treatises in their individual contents and their collective sequence, the pedagogical overtones of the crucial second chapter of *The Celestial Hierarchy* and other texts, the two technical uses of the term "uplifting" to mean "education" and "interpretation," and, in summary, the almost catechetical nature of Pseudo-Dionysian "anagogy." The corpus has the feel of a leader's manual or guide, intended not for the immediate use of all the faithful but for the guidance of the hierarch who in turn leads others on this spiritual journey.

Nothing has been said directly to the traditional question of the author's true identity. Nevertheless, one way to a fuller understanding of the Dionysian corpus, and perhaps eventually of its author, lies in taking more seriously its clear concern for the Bible and the liturgy. Their symbols and the pattern of procession and return constitute the material and the formal unity of the Dionysian writings. Despite the wide variety of themes and the great distance from *The Divine Names*, for example, to *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, a subtle interplay of Neoplatonic metaphysics, biblical exegesis, and liturgical theology does manage to hold this strange corpus together.

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Index of Citations to the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus

This index provides the page and footnote numbers for each specific citation of the Dionysian corpus. For example, CH 1 120A 5 is cited on page 28 note 8 and CH 1 120A 6f. on page 35 note 54 and 41 note 95. The system for citing the Dionysian corpus is explained on page 5 note 7. Further references to entire treatises and some specific chapters can be located by using the Index of Proper Names.

The Celestial Hierarchy

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Analytical Index

The numbers in bold type indicate the most important analyses of the topic (including notes).